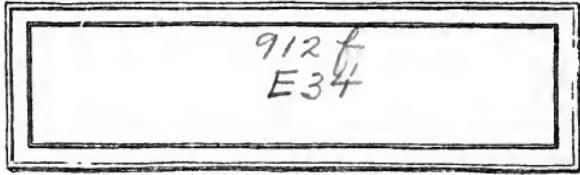
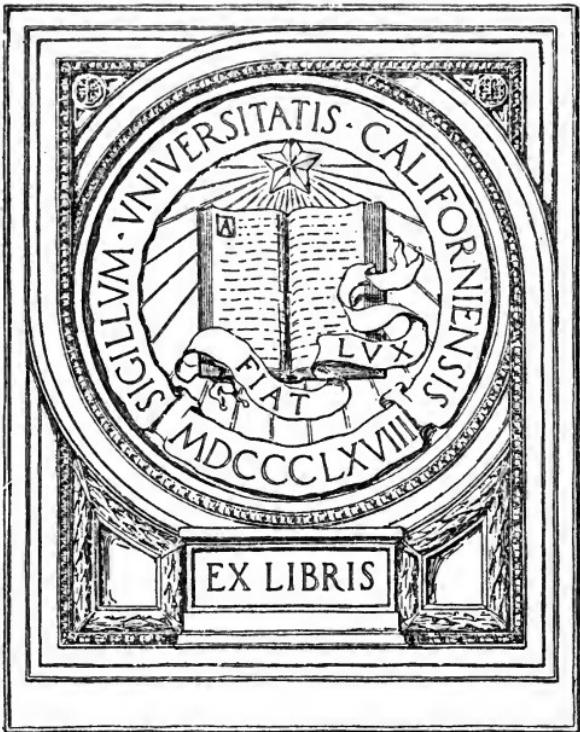


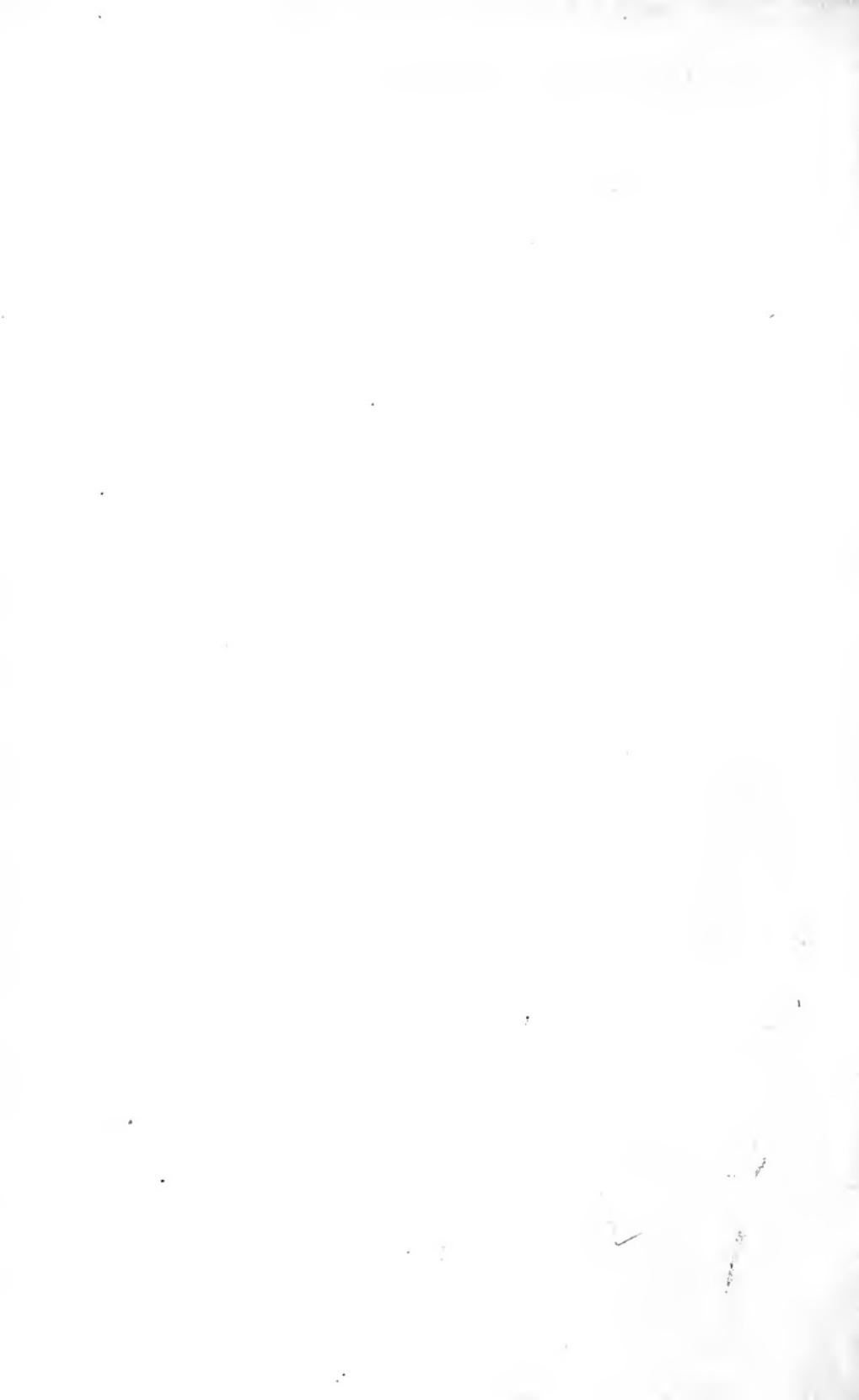
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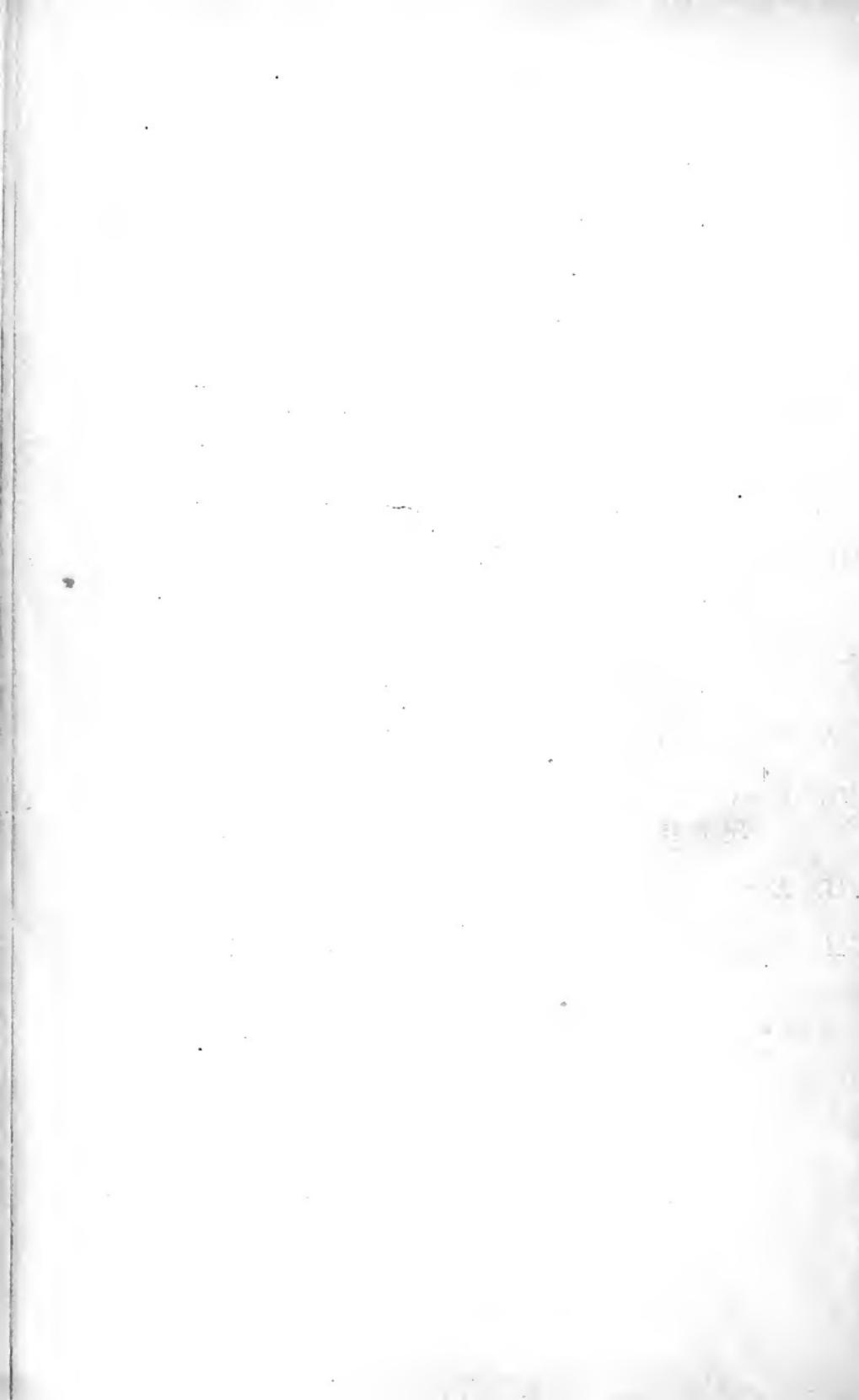
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I

STEELE AND THE SENTIMENTAL COMEDY

THERE is an essay of Goldsmith's, on the theatrical productions of his time, which a writer on the Sentimental Comedy would like to quote *in extenso*. And for this reason—that this kind of comedy, which Goldsmith described with great humour but with perfect justice in the piece in question, is a thing exceedingly difficult to define. Perhaps it is too near to us. We know it too well to be able to define it. Every one can recognize it at a glance. If you dip into a play written after 1710 or so, and find such a passage as this :—

Oh, my child ! my child ! [Embraces her, and a comic servant or trusted butler sheds manly tears.]

Child. All-gracious Heaven ! is it possible ! Do I embrace my father ?

you will know without the need of any definition that you have struck a genuine spring of that dolorous fountain of sham tears and sham wit—*La Comédie Larmoyante*, The Comedy of Sighs (that shall be changed to cries of joy in the Fifth Act), the subject of our essay—The Sentimental Comedy invented by the great essayist Sir Richard Steele.

This is how Goldsmith describes it. He has just cited the practice of the ancients in making tragedy deal with the misfortunes of the great and comedy with the humours of low life; tragedy and comedy were never in the best classical times mixed to make what Voltaire calls a ‘tradesman’s tragedy’ :—

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Yet notwithstanding this weight of authority, and the universal practice of all ages, a new species of dramatic composition has been introduced under the name of the Sentimental Comedy, in which the virtues of private life are exhibited rather than the vices exposed ; and the distresses rather than the faults of mankind make our interest in the piece.

These comedies have had of late great success, perhaps from their novelty ; and also from their flattering every man in his favourite foible. In these plays almost all the characters are good, and exceedingly generous ; they are lavish enough of their tin money on the stage ; and—though they want humour—have abundance of sentiment and feeling. If they happen to have faults and foibles the spectator is taught not only to pardon but to applaud them, in consideration of the goodness of their hearts ; so that Folly, instead of being ridiculed, is commended ; and the comedy aims at touching our passions without the power of being truly pathetic.

Goldsmith's arguments to prove that the Sentimental Comedy is an undesirable form of entertainment are by no means so good as his description. Omitting them, we come to the peroration of his essay, of which the following is a short passage :—

But there is one argument in favour of Sentimental Comedy which will keep it on the stage, in spite of all that can be said against it. It is of all others the most easily written. Those abilities that can hammer out a novel are fully sufficient for the production of a Sentimental Comedy. It is only sufficient to raise the characters a little, to deck out the hero with a riband, or give the heroine a title ; then, to put an insipid dialogue without character or humour into their mouths, give them mighty good hearts and very fine clothes, furnish a new set of scenes, make a pathetic scene or two with a sprinkling of tender melancholy conversation through the whole ; and there is no doubt but that all the ladies will cry and all the gentlemen applaud.

There we have the whole thing described—a humourless, sententious, lachrymose flattery of human nature—lights down, ‘nothing low,’ a gentle melancholy ; love the only dramatic pivot ; a comedy of lay curates and hysterical lay-curate worshippers ; Tupper and tinsel.

Of course the English drama, which sixty years before had sparkled with the wit of the ‘Restoration Dramatists’ (as they are usually called), and had been as free from sentimentality as Miss Vivie Warren, did not arrive at this pitch of dull absurdity all at once. Yet it is quite astonishing with how rapid a sweep the dramatic pendulum, if one may be permitted the metaphor, swung across from the drama of brilliant heartlessness to the drama of insipid heart-on-the-sleeve.

This is, in brief, the history of the change. In the year 1698 the celebrated Jeremy Collier, disgusted at the licence of the theatre, ‘convinced that nothing had gone further in debauching the age than the stage poets and the play-house, thought’ (as he says) ‘that he could not employ his time better than by writing against them.’ He did this in his *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*. This tremendous piece of invective, impaired, as Professor Ward says, ‘neither by intemperance of language nor by any other symptom of inferior breeding,’ was irresistible. The Restoration comedy, with all its wild indecency, had been a natural and perhaps even a salutary reaction against the Puritanism which raged in the time of Cromwell. But a reaction, if carried too far, will cause another reaction tending in the direction of the original movement—a counter-reaction. And this had undoubtedly set in when Collier wrote his *Short View*. Expressions of sympathy and approval reached him from many quarters ; even King William caused a *nolle prosequi* to be entered,

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thus relieving the Nonjuror from all further fear of proceedings against him as a political offender. Though the comic poets were championed by their ablest men—by Dennis, by Vanbrugh, by Dryden, and by Congreve—resistance was worse than useless. They had a bad cause to plead, and had at no time been quite unconscious of their offence. The counter-reaction had set in hard against them. A habit of morality soon became ‘the only wear’; writers like Mrs. Centlivre became anxious to reclaim their sinners in the last act; and in 1701 the essayist Steele, ever the champion of decency and morality, put a play upon the stage, in point of morals ‘no improper entertainment’ to be presented by the author of *The Christian Hero* to a ‘Christian commonwealth,’ as he calls our country in the preface to a later play. This was *The Funeral, or Grief à la mode*, written mainly in what one would like to call Steele’s ‘purely amusing’ as opposed to his ‘didactic’ style. It was dedicated to Isabella Countess of Albemarle, with a characteristic eulogy of the Countess’s virtues as a wife. A boisterous prologue, addressed mainly to Steele’s soldier friends (for our author had in 1694 enlisted in the Duke of Ormonde’s regiment of Guards), concluded with the lines :—

He knows he’s numerous friends; nay, knows they’ll
show it,
And for the fellow-soldier save the poet.

This was fittingly spoken by the eloquent Wilkes, and the play proved a striking success. It has an engaging freshness about it, characteristic of Steele’s best dramatic work—a kind of boyish good spirits. Even in the prologue this is seen. Speaking of the animal and acrobatic shows which were at the time in serious rivalry with the theatre, the prologizer said :—

Gorged with intemperate meals while here you sit,
You well may take activity for wit.

As our paper is on Steele the dramatist, and not merely on the Sentimental Comedy, a short account must be given of this and all his plays; but the position of Steele in dramatic history is a curious paradox. His best plays are his least important, and his worst are carefully read by the student because they so certainly represent the beginnings of that decline of our comic drama which led eventually to such a comedy as is exhibited in the *Heir at Law* when the rather overrated Dr. Pangloss is not on the stage; to Honest Kenrick, the comic Irishman, who is so affected by his mistress's doleful condition that he bursts into tears with the sensibility of a fine nature and cries 'boo-hoo'; in fine, to a very 'Turveydrop'-ism of sentimentality. A distinction has been drawn between Steele's two styles, his purely amusing and his didactic veins. The didactic was sentimental and often absurd; but the purely amusing is irresistibly lighthearted and merry. His first play, *The Funeral*, is for the most part in the latter style. It was written, he tells us, to clear his character from a kind of suspicion under which it had fallen upon the publication of *The Christian Hero*. This book was considered an offence against regimental good form, so that 'from being reckoned no undelightful companion' our author, in his own words, 'was soon reckoned a disagreeable fellow.' They found him guilty of an uncomfortable and unseasonable piety, and felt strongly that this was a quality a soldier could dispense with. *The Funeral* rehabilitated his lost character. It has passages of quite delightful comedy, though, like all Steele's dramatic work, it is, on the whole, an undoubted farce. It is very little didactic till the last Act. It is badly sentimental in places, but

cannot be called Sentimental Comedy proper. Here is the plot of it :—

Lord Brumpton, an elderly nobleman married to a young and beautiful wife, is supposed to be dead. Really he has had some fit or swoon, and his body-servant Trusty (one of the earliest examples of this well-worn character on the English stage) discovers that he is alive and apparently none the worse. All this we learn from a conversation of master and servant in the first act.

Trusty is anxious for his master to improve the occasion by concealing the fact of his recovery, so that he may watch the conduct of his supposedly bereaved wife—a course which Lord Brumpton adopts, with some misgivings, upon Trusty's earnest representations that it is justified by the lady's entirely hypocritical conduct towards her husband. She has, it appears, only pretended affection for him. She will rejoice at his death. For the rest of the play, the action of which takes place within twenty-four hours, Lord Brumpton remains in concealment and observes the Lady Brumpton's conduct. She fully justifies his worst forebodings. She is wild with delight at his death. Observe the presence of the Congreve spirit of unreality, so ably explained by Charles Lamb and so ridiculously attacked by Hazlitt and Mr. George Meredith,—her delight does not shock us in the least. It is made the occasion for very lighthearted comedy. She rehearses to her maid, Mistress Tattleaid, all the villainies of her past (with her husband, of course, behind the arras); tells how she had led him into disinheriting his son by a former marriage; how delighted she is that her husband is really dead at last; how charming it will be to wear becoming black, and, after a year's seemly grief and retirement (*ha ! ha !*), what an entrance she will make at the playhouse, how every one will run after the rich

and beautiful young widow ; finally, how clever she has been to secure the guardianship of two wards of her husband's—the ladies Sharlot and Harriot. The sub-plot is concerned with the loves of these ladies, who are kept locked up by the villainous widow—her wickedness is so tremendous as thoroughly to endear her to us (no one blames Punch for beating his wife)—in order that they may not marry before she has stolen their portions. Two faithful swains in love with Sharlot and Harriot—one the disinherited son (strange how these coincidences come about !), the other a friend of his, a Mr. Campley—contrive eventually to rescue the ladies, getting Sharlot out of the house dramatically enough, but without a great appearance of 'probability,' in Lord Brumpton's unoccupied coffin at the end of the play. Prolonged applause. Lord Brumpton enters and blesses the lovers, taking his son to his heart with great fervour. Finally, the widow herself—exposed sufficiently before—is proved to have been married to a penniless scoundrel, one Cabinet, at some period anterior to her marriage with Lord Brumpton. She had married the nobleman to support her real husband (Cabinet) on whatever she could wheedle out of her pretended husband. This state of affairs—intolerably forced as it is made to appear, for the audience have had no hint of it beforehand—is introduced to enable Lord Brumpton to revoke a will made at his pretended wife's instigation wholly in her favour, which left not a penny to his disinherited son, the Lord Hardy. Apparently Steele thought that while she continued to be his wife he could not write another will. Steele's legal knowledge was confined to the province of actions for debt. However, Lady Brumpton was not a desirable wife, and this exposure of a former marriage effects a complete riddance of her. For, hurling at the despicable Cabinet an accusation of voluntary

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cuckoldom, she flings out and the good characters heave a sigh of relief.

All is now happiness, extremely indifferent blank verse, and songs set by Mr. Daniel Purcell. After the songs Lord Brumpton—taking, we may suppose, the centre of the stage—makes a short speech, half of it in blank verse, in a vein of gentle homily, and the curtain falls.

This conclusion was, it appears, not sufficiently tedious to spoil the reception of the piece, which is till the conclusion fresh and sprightly, delightfully innocent, and abounding in a kind of easy wit.

Steele had a good sense of character, and he was of course original in his treatment of the women in the piece. The ladies Sharlot and Harriot are real women, high-spirited and frank, with a modesty that is not prudery : with such agreeable feminine weaknesses as a shy confidence in their own good looks, not insisted on to the extent of colouring the whole character but just sufficiently sketched in to give a sense of life and reality. Then the undertaker, Mr. Sable, is an original and most amusing person. He has not been mentioned before—he has very little connexion with the plot. Here is a passage in which he is marshalling his mutes for a funeral :—

Sable. Well, come, you that are to be mourners in this house, put on your sad looks, and walk by me that I may sort you. Ha, you ! a little more upon the dismal [*forming their countenances*] ; this fellow has a good mortal look—place him near the corpse. That wainscot face must be a’top of the stairs ; that fellow’s almost in a fright (that looks as if he were full of some strange misery) at the entrance of the hall—so—but I’ll fix you all myself. Let’s have no laughing now on any provocation [*makes faces*]. Look yonder, that hale, well-looking puppy ! You ungrateful scoundrel, did not I pity you, take you out of a great

man's service, and show you the pleasure of receiving wages? Did not I give you ten, then fifteen, now twenty shillings a week, to be sorrowful? and the more I give you, I think, the gladder you are.

And again, to Mistress Goody Trash :—

I wonder, Goody Trash, you could not be more punctual, when I told you I wanted you, and your two daughters, to be three virgins to-night to stand in white about my Lady Katherine Grissel's body; and you know you were privately to bring her home from the man-midwife's, where she died in childbirth, to be buried like a maid; but there is nothing minded. Well, I have put off that till to-morrow; go and get your bag of brick-dust and your whiting.

And later, to the mutes :—

Who can see such an horrid ugly phiz as that fellow's and not be shocked, offended, and killed of all joy while he beholds it? But we must not loiter.—Ye stupid rogues, whom I have picked out of all the rubbish of mankind, and fed for your eminent worthlessness, attend, and know that I speak you this moment stiff and immutable to all sense of noise, mirth, or laughter. [*Makes mouths at them as they pass by him to bring them to a constant countenance.*] So, they are pretty well—pretty well.

There is a very good scene where the widow cannot preserve the appearance of distracted grief which she has assumed, because some ladies who have called to sympathize with her will talk the most fascinating scandal in an undertone to one another :—

[*Widow is on her couch; while she is raving to herself, Tattleaid softly brings in the ladies.*]

Widow. Wretched, disconsolate as I am! Oh, welcome, welcome, dear killing anguish! Oh, that I could lie down and die in my present heaviness—but what—how? Nay, my dear, dear lord, why do you look so pale, so ghastly at me? Wottoo, wottoo, fright thy own trembling, shivering wife!

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Tattleaid. Nay, good madam, be comforted.

[*She seems inconsolable, but later the ladies talk scandal and she cannot but join in.*]

1st Lady. But, madam, don't you hear what the town says of the jilt Flirt the men liked so much in the Park? Hark ye—was seen with him in an hackney coach—and silk stockings—key-hole—his wig on the chair. [Whispers by interruptions.]

2nd Lady. Impudent Flirt, to be found out!

3rd Lady. But I speak it only to you.

4th Lady. Nor I but to one more. [Whispers next woman.]

5th Lady. I can't believe it; nay, I always thought it, madam. [Whispers the widow.]

Widow. Sure, 'tis impossible! the demure, prim thing! Sure, the world's hypocrisy. Well, I thank the stars, whatsoever sufferings I have, I've none in reputation. I wonder at the men; I could never think her handsome. She has really a good shape and complexion, but no mien; and no woman has the use of her beauty without mien! Her charms are dumb, they want utterance. But whither does distraction lead me—to talk of charms?

Indeed, it would mean reading quite half the play if one were to quote all those passages which show Steele a delightful humorist of a new kind. But it is only fair to say that there are some pages of moralizing and sentiment which, taken together and the humorous parts excluded, would almost justify Hazlitt's sneer about dramatized sermons.

To illustrate the sentimentality to be found even in this first play of Steele's one more extract must be given. Trusty, the old body-servant of Lord Brumpton, discovers Lord Hardy, the disinherited son, in very decent lodgings, and sentimentalizes over him. The delightful name the

French have given to their own sentimental comedy, *La Comedie Larmoyante*, applies most admirably to scenes of this kind :—

Trusty. Why, my lord, I presume to wait on your lordship. My lord, you're strangely grown ; you're your father's very picture, you're he, my lord ; you are the very man that looked so pleased to see me look so fine in my lace livery, to go to Court. I was his page when he was just such another as you. He kissed me afore a great many lords, and said I was a brave man's son, that taught him to exercise his arms. I remember he carried me to the great window, and bid me be sure to keep in your mother's sight in all my finery. She was the finest young creature ; the maids of honour hated to see her at Court. My lord then courted my good lady. She was as kind to me on her deathbed ; she said to me, Mr. Trusty, take care of my lord's second marriage for that child's sake. She pointed as well as she could to you. You fell a-crying, and said she should not die ; but she did, my lord. She left the world, and no one like her in't. Forgive me, my honoured master. [Weeps, runs to my lord, and hugs him.] I've often carried you in these arms that grasp you ; they were stronger then, but if I die to-morrow, you're worth five thousand pounds by my gift—'tis what I've got in the family, and I return it to you with thanks. But alas ! do I live to see you want it ?

This passage won the commendation of Blackmore, himself a would-be reformer of the stage. His *Prince Arthur* (1795) was written before Collier's *Short View*, but was ridiculed on the ground of its want of merit, and made little impression, where Collier effected a revolution.

Steele's next play, *The Lying Lover, or the Ladies' Friendship* (1703), was to be much less witty and amusing and much more sentimental. *The Lying Lover* is the first instance of the Sentimental Comedy in England. Pro-

fessor Ward, in his *History of the English Drama*, gives this reason for the infusion of sentiment with which Steele—on a hint from Cibber, who followed most carefully the taste of a public he thoroughly understood—so liberally dosed this play and his final and very successful play, *The Conscious Lovers*, of which more later. Mr. Ward says :—

The origin of the mistake here committed is to be sought in a distrust of the means by which comedy works, as if they were insufficient for the production of the requisite dramatic effect. Instead of contenting himself with making vice and folly ridiculous, the author applies himself to provoking a response from the emotion of pity. Such a response is not likely to be refused to his kindly and tender touch ; but his resort to an expedient outside the range of the proper resources of comedy announces the approaching virtual extinction of that species in our dramatic literature.

And again :—

Steele, as a dramatist, came to mistake the true means and methods of the comic drama. His own comic genius lacked the sustained vigour which is required by the stage ; and his artistic sense was too keen altogether to have left him unconscious of his inability to satisfy his moral purpose by holding up to ridicule with unflagging persistence those human vices and follies which are the proper subjects of comedy. He therefore called in sentiment to aid humour, availing himself of the reaction against the grosser methods of provoking laughter and amusement which had set in as part of the general reaction against the licence of the Restoration age.

But to return to *The Lying Lover*. It was acted at Drury Lane in December, 1703, and ran for six nights. It was considered a failure, and is certainly a very dull play. Steele said it was ‘damned for its piety,’ and very likely

had it been less decorous it would have pleased the public better ; yet, though this may have been a minor cause, one hopes that the audience objected more to the horrible blank verse passages which crop up unexpectedly when any of the characters feels that he or she can improve the occasion with what a certain class of religious propagandists call ‘a few words’. ‘A few words’ with Steele means something of this kind :—

Lovemore. I can hold out no longer [*throws off disguises*] ; Lovemore still lives to adore your noble friendship, and begs a share in’t. Be not amazed ! but let me clasp you both, who in an age as degenerate as this have such transcendent virtue.

Young Bookwit. Oh, Lovemore, Lovemore, how shall I speak my joy at your recovery !

Then, as the occasion demands, in very blank verse :—

I fail beneath the too ecstatic pleasure !
What help has human nature from its sorrows
When our relief itself is such a burden ?

It is horrible to think of a public which would enjoy and applaud this ; but theatrical audiences soon got over their first distaste, and in a very short time would endure no new play which was not ornamented with these curious and unreal moralizings, couched in a language equally artificial and unreal.

The plot of *The Lying Lover* is of little importance, being taken for the most part from Corneille’s *Le Menteur*, which was in its turn taken from the *Verdad Sospechosa* of Ruiz de Alarcon. Here it is in brief :—

Latine and Bookwit are undergraduates who have left Oxford without attempting to take any degree. They seem to have a great deal of ready money, indeed Bookwit

is a perfect Croesus. The play is full of improbabilities. They are discovered in conversation. Bookwit is giving his views on love, and his first remarks excellently exhibit the sentimental nature of the play, and strike the key-note of the kind of drama under discussion.

I can see when the soul is divided by a sparkling tear
that twinkles and betrays the heart. A sparkling tear's
the livery of love, of love made up of hope and fear, of joy
and grief.

His conversation is not, however, by any means confined to this manner of speech, and he is frequently extremely amusing, as in his exposition of love-making, which is far better than his pathology of love. His method is simplicity itself—select your lady and tell her lies which tend to your own self-glorification. This he does with great effect to the Lady Penelope. She is a perfect stranger to him, but, meeting her in the Mall, he renders her some small service and promptly engages her in conversation. He tells her he is a soldier, brags about his valour with so bluff and splendid an air that both the Lady Penelope and her friend the Lady Victoria are greatly impressed. 'I swear he is a very pretty fellow,' says the latter, 'and how readily the thing talks.' Then, to the end of the play, he constantly appears in the most ridiculous light, both to the ladies and to everybody else. Steele, who has usually in his plays (as has been said) a good eye for character, quite failed in the case of Young Bookwit. Even quite insignificant persons are sketched consistently, as for instance Frederick in the present play. But Bookwit, who has been a fellow of wit and good sense, becomes in the middle of the play a mere gorgeous fop and at the end a pathetic declaimer, a hero of melodrama.

He is made to treat Covent Garden Market as a bower

for love-making, appearing there with a band of musicians who play as he directs them by a motion of his hand, in a stirring martial strain while he is telling the lady of his military experiences, and in the soft Lydian mode when he is discoursing of the tender passion. But the ladies have discovered some of his more elaborate romancings to be baseless, and they make fun of him, twit him with falsehood, and leave him; whereat he goes away and gets thoroughly drunk. While in this state he fights a duel with a hated rival, an excellent but jealous fellow—one Lovemore—and leaves him for dead. The watch rush in, arrest every one they can lay their hands on; some of their number presently appear dragging Bookwit; and finally *exeunt omnes* to Newgate prison! Then we come to the ‘strong’ scene of the play. Corneille is put on one side, and we may imagine Steele giving his utmost attention and care to the psychology of remorse. But remorse is no uncommon state of mind in the case of a man who has been very drunk the night before, and the sententious and sentimental nature of Bookwit’s repentant utterances seems (to me at least) not a little disgusting. A short extract from Act V will illustrate this, and (incidentally) exhibit the influence of Shakespeare upon Steele, when the latter wrote in blank verse. This is a purely incidental point, but perhaps not an irrelevancy.

Young Bookwit. How heavily do I awake this morning! Oh, this senseless drinking! To suffer a whole week’s pain for an hour’s jollity! Methinks my senses are burning round me. I have but interrupted hints of the last night. Ha! in a gaol! Oh, I remember, I remember. Oh, Lovemore, Lovemore! I remember—

Latine. You must have patience, and bear it like a man.

Young Bookwit. Oh, whither shall I run to avoid myself? Why all these bars? These bolted iron gates?

They're needless to secure me—Here, here's my rack,
My gaol, my torture—

Oh, I can't bear it. I cannot bear the rushing of new thoughts;

Fancy expands my senses to distraction,
And my soul stretches to that boundless space
To which I've sent my wretched, wretched friend.

Oh, Latine! Latine! Is all our mirth and humour come to this?

Give me thy bosom, close in thy bosom hide me
From thy eyes; I cannot bear their pity or reproach.

Latine. Dear Bookwit, how heartily I love you—I don't know what to say. But pray have patience.

Young Bookwit. If you can't bear my pain that's but communicated by your pity, how shall I my proper inborn woe,—my wounded mind?

Latine. In all assaults of fortune that should be serene, not in the power of accident or chance—

Young Bookwit. Words! words! all that is but mere talk. Perhaps, indeed, to undeserved affliction Reason and argument may give relief, Or in the known vicissitudes of life We may feel comfort by our self-persuasion; But oh! there is no taking away guilt: This divine particle will ache for ever. There is no help but whence I dare not ask; When this material organ's indisposed Juleps may cool and anodynes give rest; But nothing mix with this celestial drop, But dew from that high Heaven of which 'tis part.¹

The scene in Newgate has some good humorous matter in it. The alchemist, who was really a coiner, and the gentleman of high courage and independent spirit whose philosophy of life led him to declare war on society, Mr.

¹ There is quite a Shakespearian sound about the whole of this last passage, though 'Juleps may cool', &c., is a poor substitute for 'not poppy nor mandragora'.

Storm, a highwayman, are very humorously conceived. But there is at all times in the play a most plentiful lack of any sense of dramatic propriety. Long rhetorical speeches, the language of which would pass very well in an Essay, but which appears awkward and involved on the stage; sudden outbursts of that kind of blank verse which occurs (written as prose) in the pathetic passages of Mr. Jerome K. Jerome's books; the superimposition (on a groundwork of frothy foppery, compliment, and farcical unreality) of such scenes as that in which Bookwit's father weeps over his son, who will presently be condemned (as he believes) to the gallows—these are dramatic faults more serious than the mere adhibition of an atmosphere of sincere piety. On the whole it must be confessed the play is dull, rambling, and inartistic.

If Steele could have ended it with the discovery that Lovemore had not really been killed after all, perhaps he might have rung down the curtain, with the audience still unexasperated, but he had the love-plot of the ladies Penelope and Victoria, of Lovemore and Bookwit, to wind up. The agonies of Bookwit's father, when he believes his son to be in danger of losing his life for the homicide, if they are not comedy, have at any rate a certain dramatic force which is wanting elsewhere in the play. The concluding scene represents Lovemore—who has contrived to hide the fact that he is not really dead almost as long as Lord Brumpton—in disguise, with his *fidus Achates* Frederick playing upon the remorse of Penelope. She believes it was due to her coquetry that Lovemore was killed, and laments her former harshness to the quasi-deceased with an exhibition of tragic grief which is rendered ridiculous to a degree by the presence of the quasi-deceased himself. Finally, when her spirit is absolutely broken,

Frederick, the useful Frederick, discloses the deceit, and the erewhile high-spirited Penelope consents to marry Lovemore without a word of surprise or any complaint that she should have been cheated into spending the best part of a quarter of an hour in a perfect agony of grief. This is impossible psychology and imbecile comedy. Though this is a bad play artistically, it has an historical importance as being the first instance of the Sentimental Comedy in England. It is necessary to quote one other short extract. This gives us what is probably the best instance of Bookwit's impromptu lying. His father wants him to marry and, to prevent this, he declares he is already married. His father is extremely surprised, and would know the circumstances. He at once plunges into a long story of a secret visit to a lady at Oxford—her father coming upstairs—his own concealment.

Old Bookwit. But she!—

Young Bookwit. She, by general answers, in that case managed it so well that he was going down, when instantly my watch in my pocket struck ten. He turns him short on his amazed daughter, asked where she had it. She cried her cousin Martha sent it out of the country to be mended for her. He said he would take care on't. She comes to me, but, as I was giving it her, the string was so entangled in the cock of a pistol I always had about me on those occasions, that my haste to disengage it fired it off. My mistress swoons away. The father ran out, crying out murder. I thought her dead, feared his return, which he soon did with two boisterous rogues, his sons, and his whole family of servants. I would have made my escape, but they opposed me with drawn swords. I wounded both; but a lusty wench, with a fire-shovel, at one blow struck down my sword, and broke it all to pieces.

Old Bookwit. But still, the poor young lady!

Young Bookwit. Here was I seized. Meantime, Matilda wakes from her trance, beholding me held like a ruffian,

both her brothers bleeding. She was returning to it. What should I do ? I saw the hoary head in the divided sorrow, for his sons' lives and daughter's honour, of both which he thought me the invader. She, with pitying, dying and reproaching looks, beseeched me, and taught me what I owed her constant love. I yielded, sir, I own I yielded to the just terror of their family resentment, and to my mistress's more dreadful upbraiding. Thus am I, sir, the martyr of an honest passion.

Old Bookwit. That I most blame is that you concealed it from your best friend. I'll instantly to Penelope's father, and make my apology. He is my friend. [Exit.

Latine. This marriage strangely surprised me.

Young Bookwit. Why, did you believe it, too, as well as the old gentleman ? Why, then, I did it excellently. Ha ! ha ! ha !

It is a great pleasure to turn from *The Lying Lover* to Steele's next play, *The Tender Husband*, or *The Accomplished Fools*. This was produced by Rich in 1705, with the charming Mrs. Oldfield in the part of the heroine. The plot may for the most part, like that of *The Funeral*, be called original, with the exception of a short episode in the fourth Act, which is in part taken from Molière's *Le Sicilien*, or *L'Amour Peintre*. The play is still farce and will not bear any translation into the conditions of real life, but it sparkles everywhere with wit. It is most original and fresh in its treatment of character, and it has that quiet deep humour and idyllic charm which distinguishes *The Vicar of Wakefield*. The plot is cleverly worked out, and the characters are clearly and consistently sketched.

If one may criticize the critics (it is usually done), it must be said that they have made far too little of the individual differences existing between Steele's four plays. I suspect that those who wrote the accounts of Steele which

I read before writing this paper, had not all read either *The Lying Lover* or *The Tender Husband*. It is usual to say of Steele's plays as a whole that they are dull, and more like sermons than plays. But *The Tender Husband* has hardly any moralizing in it, and is quite as amusing as either of Goldsmith's two plays. Tony Lumpkin, in *She Stoops to Conquer*, has his prototype in Steele's play, and, as will be noticed in the account of the plot, Sheridan and Fielding both owe something to Steele in the parts of Lydia Languish and Squire Western. Too little is made of the fact that Steele's *Funeral*—in the first four Acts at least—and his *Tender Husband* are written in the vein of 'harmless amusement' in which he excelled, while *The Lying Lover* and *The Conscious Lovers* are plays written from the point of view of the lay-preacher in what I have ventured to call his didactic style. There is, if one must confess it, just a little of that horrid thing the revivalist in Steele. He is too like his own Mr. Bookwit, normally an amusing expansive good fellow, but a moralist to be shunned when he is crapulous. *The Tender Husband*, however, is, as we have said, written almost entirely in Steele's happier vein.

This is the plot of it. Captain Clerimont, the usual gentlemanly adventurer of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century comedy, is anxious to marry a fortune, and he acquaints his good friend Mr. Pounce, a rascally but wholly delightful lawyer, that Mistress Biddy Tipkin, the daughter of the rich banker Hezekiah Tipkin of Lombard Street, seems to him a most desirable match. Here is a short extract from the conversation of Pounce and Clerimont on this important matter:—

Pounce. To my knowledge, ten thousand pounds in money.

Clerimont. Such a stature, such a blooming countenance, so easy a shape !

Pounce. In jewels of her grandmother's, five thousand.

Cler. Her wit so lively, her mien so alluring !

Pounce. In land, a thousand a year.

Cler. Her lips have that certain prominence, that swelling softness, that they invite to a pressure ; her eyes that languish, that they give pain, though they look only inclined to rest ; her whole person that one charm—

Pounce. [professionally] Raptures ! raptures !

Cler. How can it, so insensibly to itself, lead us through cares it knows not, through such a wilderness of hopes, fears, joys, sorrows, desires, despairs, ecstasies and torments, with so sweet, yet so anxious vicissitude !

Pounce. Why, I thought you had never seen her ?

Cler. No more I ha'n't.

Pounce. Who told you then of her inviting lips, her soft sleepy eyes ?

Cler. You yourself.

Pounce. Sure, you rave, I never spoke of her afore to you.

Cler. Why, you won't face me down. Did you not just now say she had ten thousand pounds in money, five in jewels, and a thousand a year ?

Pounce. I confess my own stupidity and her charms. Why, if you were to meet, you would certainly please her, *you have the cant of loving.*

And later :—

Well then, since we may be free, you must understand, the young lady, by being kept from the world, has made a world of her own. She has spent all her solitude in reading romances, her head is full of shepherds, knights, flowery meads, groves, and streams, so that if you talk like a man of this world to her, you do nothing.

Cler. Oh, let me alone, I have been a great traveller in fairy-land myself. I know Oroondates ; Cassandra, Astraea, and Clelia¹ are my intimate acquaintance.

¹ *Astrea* was a French romance by Honoré d'Urfé; *Clelia* was by Mme de Scudéry (d. 1701); *Cassandra* by Gautier de Costes, Seigneur de Calprenède.

Mr. Pounce, stimulated by a bribe of a thousand pounds, is quite willing to use his influence with the banker for furthering the match, but unfortunately a country booby Humphry Gubbin, whom we have mentioned as the prototype of Tony Lumpkin, is about to be married to the lady perforce at the instance of his father, Sir Harry Gubbin, whose character in its main features reappears in Fielding's *Squire Western*. Here is a short scene in which Sir Harry makes his proposals to Biddy Tipkin's father the banker, a heavy man with a turn for portentous commonplace in his conversation.

Sir Harry Gubbin. Look ye, brother Tipkin, as I told you before, my business in town is to dispose of a hundred head of cattle, and my son.

Tipkin. Brother Gubbin, as I signified to you in my last, bearing date September 13th, my niece has a thousand pounds per annum, and because I have found you a plain-dealing man (particularly in the easy pad you put into my hands last summer), I was willing you should have the refusal of my niece, provided that I have a discharge from all prospects while her guardian, and one thousand pounds for my care.

Sir Harry. Aye, but brother, you rate her too high, the war has fetched down the price of women ; the whole nation is overrun with petticoats ; our daughters lie upon our hands, Brother Tipkin ; girls are drugs, sir, mere drugs.

Tipkin. Look ye, Sir Harry, let girls be what they will, a thousand pounds a year is a thousand pounds a year ; and a thousand pounds a year is neither girl nor boy.

Sir Harry. Look ye, Mr. Tipkin, the main article with me is, that foundation of wife's rebellion, and husband's cuckoldom, that cursed pin-money. Five hundred pounds per annum pin-money !

Tipkin. The word pin-money, Sir Harry, is a term !

But there are difficulties in the way. Humphry Gubbin, though too much afraid of his father's crab-tree

cudgel to say so, is secretly disinclined to marry his cousin, while a short extract from a conversation between Mistress Tipkin and her aunt on the subject of the proposed match will give us some idea of the favour with which that excessively romantic little person regarded her booby-swain.

Aunt. Come, niece, come ; you don't do well to make sport with your relations, especially with a young gentleman that has so much kindness for you.

Niece. Kindness for me ! What a phrase is there to express the darts and flames, the sighs and languishings, of an expecting lover !

Aunt. Pray, niece, forbear this idle trash, and talk like other people. Your cousin Humphry will be true and hearty in what he says, and that's a great deal better than the talk and compliment of romances.

Niece. Good madam, don't wound my ears with such expressions ; do you think I can ever love a man that's *true* and *hearty* ? What a peasant-like amour do these coarse words import ! True and hearty ! Pray, aunt, endeavour a little at the embellishment of your style.

Aunt. Alack-a-day, cousin Biddy, these idle romances have quite turned your head.

Niece. How often must I desire you, madam, to lay aside that familiar name, cousin Biddy ? I never hear it without blushing. Did you ever meet with a heroine in those idle romances, as you call 'em, that was termed Biddy ?

Aunt. Ah ! cousin, cousin, these are mere vapours, indeed ; nothing but vapours.

Niece. No, the heroine has always something soft and engaging in her name ; something that gives us a notion of the sweetness of her beauty and behaviour ; a name that glides through half a dozen tender syllables as Elismonda, Clidamira, Deidamia, that runs upon vowels off the tongue ; not hissing through one's teeth, or breaking them with consonants. 'Tis strange rudeness those familiar names they give us, when there is Aurelia, Sacharissa, Gloriana, for people of condition, and Celia, Chloris, Corinna, Mopsa, for their maids and those of lower rank.

Aunt. Look ye, Biddy, this is not to be supported. I know not where you learned this nicety ; but I can tell you, forsooth, as much as you despise it, your mother was a Bridget afore you, and an excellent housewife.

Niece. Good madam, don't upbraid me with my mother Bridget, and an excellent housewife.

Aunt. Yes, I say she was ; and spent her time in better learning than you ever did—not in reading of fights and battles of dwarfs and giants, but in writing out receipts for broths, possets, caudles, and surfeit-waters, as became a good country gentlewoman.

Niece. My mother, and a Bridget !

Aunt. Yes, niece, I say again, your mother, my sister, was a Bridget ! the daughter of her mother Margery, of her mother Sisly, of her mother Alice.

Niece. Have you no mercy ? Oh, the barbarous genealogy !

Aunt. Of her mother Winifred, of her mother Joan.

Niece. Since you will run on, then I must needs tell you I am not satisfied in the point of my nativity. Many an infant has been placed in a cottage with obscure parents, till by chance some ancient servant of the family has known it by its marks.

Aunt. Aye, you had best be searched. That's like your calling the winds the fanning gales, before I don't know how much company ; and the tree that was blown by it had, forsooth, a spirit imprisoned in the trunk of it.

And later :—

Niece. Live comfortably ! What kind of life is that ? A great heiress live comfortably ! Pray, aunt, learn to raise your ideas. What is, I wonder, to live comfortably ?

Aunt. To live comfortably is to live with prudence and frugality, as we do in Lombard Street.

Niece. As we do ! That's a fine life, indeed, with one servant of each sex. Let's see how many things our coachman is good for. He rubs down his horses, lays the cloth, whets the knives, and sometimes makes beds.

Aunt. A good servant should turn his hand to everything in a family.

Niece. Nay, there's not a creature in our family that has not two or three different duties. As John is butler, footman, and coachman, so Mary is cook, laundress, and chambermaid.

Aunt. Well, and do you laugh at that?

Niece. No, not I; nor at the coach-horses, though one has an easy trot for my uncle's riding, and t'other an easy pace for your side-saddle.

Aunt. And so you jeer at the good management of your relations, do you?

Niece. No, I'm well satisfied that all the house are creatures of business; but, indeed, was in hopes that my poor little lapdog might have lived with me upon my fortune without an employment; but my uncle threatens every day to make him a turnspit, that he too, in his sphere, may help us to live comfortably.

Aunt. Hark ye, cousin Biddy.

Niece. I vow I'm out of countenance when our butler, with his careful face, drives us all stowed in a chariot drawn by one horse ambling and t'other trotting, with his provisions behind for the family, from Saturday night till Monday morning, bound for Hackney—then we make a comfortable figure, indeed.

Aunt. So we do, and so will you always, if you marry your cousin Humphry.

Niece. Name not the creature.

Later in the play she makes fun of Gubbin in a very characteristic way

Niece. Sir, your person and address bring to my mind the whole history of Valentine and Orson. What, would they marry me to a wild man? Pray answer me a question or two.

Humphry. Aye, aye; as many as you please, cousin Bridget.

Niece. What wood were you taken in? How long have you been caught?

Humphry. Caught!

Niece. Where were your haunts?

Humphry. My haunts!

Niece. Are not clothes very uneasy to you? Is this strange dress the first you ever wore?

Humphry. How?

Niece. Are you not a great admirer of roots, and raw flesh? Let me look upon your nails. Don't you love blackberries, haws, and pig-nuts, mightily?

Humphry. How?

Niece. Canst thou deny that thou wert suckled by a wolf? You have not been so barbarous, I hope, since you came among men, as to hunt your nurse, have you?

The part of Biddy Tipkin seems to me to be infinitely better than any other in Steele, just as *The Tender Husband* is by far the best play. Congreve himself could hardly have improved the graceful easiness of writing which characterizes many of Biddy's speeches.

Biddy is romance-struck, as imaginative people are sometimes stage-struck, and is of course the subject of every one's laughter, yet one feels instinctively that this hyper-romanticism is only a phase, one admires the wit with which she defends herself against the common-sense and commonplace people who surround her; and these very people, with their view of life quite as laughable and much less picturesque, make her the more attractive by contrast.

To continue the story of the plot. While her aunt is urging Biddy to accept Humphry Gubbin, the diplomatic and interested Mr. Pounce comes up with Clerimont, introduces the Captain, and then walks off with the aunt to talk to her about her investments. The romantic figure of the Captain (who has had the forethought to put his arm into a sling), and his magnificently poetical observations upon the 'gloomy shades' about them (they were in St. James's Park), completely engage Biddy's affections at first sight.

Finally Clerimont contrives to carry off Biddy, coming to the house disguised as a painter on the very day fixed for the marriage of Biddy and Gubbin.

This device of Clerimont's disguise, though it seems to be borrowed from Molière's *Le Sicilien*, yet gives occasion for some very telling and amusing light satire on painters and their methods.

The sub-plot introduces us to Clerimont's brother, who, as his wife seems too ready to listen to her numerous would-be lovers, dresses a former flame of his (Mrs. Fainlove) as a man. 'I don't design you', says he, 'to personate a real man, you are only to be a pretty gentleman,' and instructs her in this disguise to make violent love to his lady. Eventually he surprises them together. The lady weeps and swears repentance. Clerimont cannot bear to see her in tears, and they are reconciled with kisses. The Lay Preacher has a word to say on Marriage, but says it briefly and pointedly, and we may suppose Mr. and Mrs. Clerimont, sen. live happily ever after. Which brings us to the end of the play, for Mr. Pounce, with a trifling exertion of his famous strategy and tact, promptly marries the discarded Mrs. Fainlove to Humphry Gubbin, to the great joy of both. The 'heavy fathers,' Mr. Tipkin and Mr. Gubbin, rage immoderately, but of course are finally brought to see that nothing they can do will alter the case. Biddy is married to Clerimont, Gubbin to Mrs. Fainlove, Mr. Clerimont, sen. practically re-married to Mrs. Clerimont, and the effect of these six delightful people, immoderately pleased with themselves and the world, is too much even for a heavy father, so a romping dance concludes the whole, as in the Otway-Molière *Cheats of Scapin*.

It is a delightful play. True, no philosophy of life can be derived from it; it is, one must confess, more farce than

comedy, but it is perpetually witty. Steele is at his best in it, and exhibits a great advance upon his former dramatic style ; the heavy periods are gone, and an easy colloquial style of unforced witty writing has taken their place. The plot cannot properly be called a Sentimental Comedy.

One wishes Steele had ended his dramatic work here. But he did not. His next play—*The Conscious Lovers*—was produced many years later, in fact not till 1722. Its original title, according to Professor Ward, seems to have been *The Unfashionable Lovers*. It is sentimental to a degree, ill-constructed, undramatic, and in its incidents as farcical as Farquhar. Indeed, the latter's preposterous disguises, 'Clincher senior disguised in a blanket', 'Old Mirabel disguised as a Spaniard', and so forth, which Farquhar's boisterous high spirits and ready invention make possible, have their counterparts in Steele's play, which was obviously intended to be a kind of sententious high comedy. If Steele had introduced a Clincher senior disguised in a blanket, as he was quite capable of doing at the time he wrote *The Conscious Lovers*, a young Clincher, son to Clincher senior, would have turned to his *fidus Achates* and said gravely : 'Indisputably, Tom, respect is a father's due, even though he appeared in the costume our father Adam wore in the lovely bowers of Eden.' And the thought of Mr. Collier's attack on Congreve's use of the name Jehu for a hackney coachman would then have led him to the suppression of 'our father Adam'.

It is extremely difficult to take this play seriously ; parts of it might have been written by Mr. Barlow, the preceptor of Sandford and Merton. The words of Sir John Bevil at the conclusion of the play are typical of it :

Now, ladies and gentlemen, you have set the world

a fair example ; your happiness is owing to your constancy and merit ; and the several difficulties you have struggled with evidently show

Whate'er the generous mind itself denies,
The secret care of Providence supplies.

This it is

to refine the age,

To chasten wit and moralize the stage,

to quote the prologue of the play. Postulate an impossible plot, impossible characters, and from these the writer of comedy conceives it his mission to justify the ways of God to man !

The plot is taken in part from the *Andria* of Terence. The play was well cast, with Booth and Mrs. Oldfield in the principal parts. It was put on the stage with new scenery and new dresses : it ran for eighteen nights, was a great success, and was often revived up to the year 1760. It was dedicated to King William III, with an evidently sincere panegyric of that splendid man, interesting from its allusion to the king's unpopularity with the general mass of the people. The plot is as follows :—

Sir John Bevil, a model father, has arranged for the marriage of a model son, young Bevil, with a young lady of great beauty and virtue, her name Lucinda, daughter to old Sealand, a fabulously rich India merchant. But this lady is in love with, and beloved by, Mr. Myrtle, Bevil's greatest friend, therefore Bevil (confident that he will be rejected !) agrees to his father's proposals. He will so be able to obey his excellent father (at no expense to himself), and it is the mark of an excellent young man to obey his father. So he argues to himself with absolute gravity, after calming his spirits for the vicissitudes of the day with a thoughtful reading of 'this charming vision of Mirza¹' :

¹ By his friend Addison.

it never occurs to him that there is anything ridiculous in this scheme, which he describes as what he is ‘not very good at, though it is an honest dissimulation’. The amount of virtual lying into which this leads him is horrid to contemplate in the case of so superior a being. For he is literally constructed as a model, a pattern of filial duty. He is as perfect as Sir Charles Grandison. Here is a short extract from the play, which gives us a glimpse of Bevil and his father. Bevil, it should be said, has immense wealth derived from a legacy from his mother. He is not in any way dependent on his father.

Tom. Sir John Bevil, sir, is in the next room.

Bevil Jun. Dunce! Why did not you bring him in?

Tom. I told him, sir, you were in your closet.

Bevil Jun. I thought you had known, sir, it was my duty to see my father anywhere. [Going himself to the door.

Tom. The devil’s in my master! he has always more wit than I have. [Aside.

BEVIL JUN. introducing SIR JOHN.

Bevil Jun. Sir, you are the most gallant, the most complaisant of all parents. Sure ’tis not a compliment to say these lodgings are yours. Why would you not walk in, sir?

Sir John Bevil. I was loth to interrupt you unseasonably on your wedding-day.

Bevil Jun. One to whom I am beholden for my birthday might have used less ceremony.

Sir John Bevil. But, dear Jack, are you in earnest in all this? And will you really marry her?

Bevil Jun. Did I ever disobey any command of yours, sir? nay, any inclination that I saw you bent upon?

[Observe the equivocation.]

Sir John Bevil. Why, I can’t say you have, son; but methinks in this whole business, you have not been so warm as I could have wished you. You have visited her, it’s true, but you have not been particular. Every one

knows you can say and do as handsome things as any man ; but you have done nothing but loved in the general—been complaisant only.

Bevil Jun. As I am ever prepared to marry if you bid me, so I am ready to let it alone if you will have me.

Sir John Bevil, however, although his son appears so perfectly ready to comply with his wishes, meets elsewhere with an unexpected obstacle. Sealand suddenly declares that young Bevil is not of sufficiently good moral character to marry his daughter. Sir John is astounded, as well he might be. But Sealand is firm. Bevil, he says, is paying large sums of money to some woman who cannot but be his mistress. In reality the lady in question, our heroine the fair Indiana, is a distressed damsels whose romantic story, a tale of many hardships endured on land and sea, Bevil tells at length in confidence to his father's trusty body-servant, our old friend Trusty of *The Funeral*, reincarnated under the name of Humphry. This lady, robbed as she has been of all her small fortune, would have been without the means of life but for the chivalrous conduct of Mr. Bevil, who rescued her from the clutches of the man who had not only stolen her money, but was actually dragging her through the streets to prison. Bevil then, it appears, made a secret composition with this fellow to let her go, brought her to England (she had been before in France), and supported her in luxury, giving as his reason, when she questioned him indirectly on the point, that some men who did not care for wine, or sports, or the Arts, were yet connoisseurs in distressed beauty. This scene is typical, and as well worth quoting as any :

Indiana. My aunt would needs have it that no man ever does any extraordinary kindness or service for a woman, but for his own sake.

Bevil. Well, madam ! Indeed I can't but be of her mind.

Indiana. What, though he should maintain and support her, without demanding anything of her, on her part?

Bevil. Why, madam, is making an expense in the service of a valuable woman (for such I must suppose her), though she should never do him any favour, nay, though she should never know who did her such service, such a mighty heroic business?

Indiana. Certainly! I should think he must be a man of an uncommon mould.

Bevil. Dear madam, why so? 'tis but, at best, a better taste in expense. To bestow upon one, whom he may think one of the ornaments of the whole creation, to be conscious, that from his superfluity, an innocent, a virtuous spirit is supported above the temptations and sorrows of life! That he sees satisfaction, health and gladness in her countenance, while he enjoys the happiness of seeing her (as that I will suppose too, or he must be too abstracted, too insensible), I say, if he is allowed to delight in that prospect; alas, what mighty matter is there in all this?

Indiana. No mighty matter in so disinterested a friendship!

Bevil. Disinterested! I can't think him so; your hero, madam, is no more than what every gentleman ought to be, and I believe very many are. He is only one who takes more delight in reflections than in sensations. He is more pleased with thinking than eating; that's the utmost you can say of him. Why, madam, a greater expense than all this, men lay out upon an unnecessary stable of horses.

Indiana. Can you be sincere in what you say?

Bevil. You may depend upon it, if you know any such man, he does not love dogs inordinately.

Indiana. No, that he does not.

Bevil. Nor cards, nor dice.

Indiana. No.

Bevil. Nor bottle companions.

Indiana. No.

Bevil. Nor loose women.

Indiana. No, I'm sure he does not.

Bevil. Take my word then, if your admired hero is not liable to any of these kind of demands, there's no such pre-

eminence in this as you imagine. Nay, this way of expense you speak of is what exalts and raises him that has a taste for it ; and, at the same time, his delight is incapable of satiety, disgust, or penitence.

Here, perhaps, we have Bevil at his best. He has, with all his priggishness, a philosophic placidity about him, something of that quiet self-satisfaction which is the goal most philosophers aim at, both pagan and Christian. There is just a suggestion of Miss Austen's admirable D'Arcy about him. But for Indiana, the heroine, what can be said for her ? She accepts without protest most lavish presents, besides an extremely comfortable and well-appointed house, from Bevil, hoping that he intends to marry her, and of course confident that his motives are above suspicion. It is a question of taste, but she seems to us a little wanting in self-respect. She expostulates with her aunt, who imputes motives of interest. 'If he is an ill man, let us look into his stratagems. Here is another of them [*showing letter*]. Here's two hundred and fifty pounds in bank-notes with these words : "To pay for the set of dressing plate which will be brought home to-morrow." ' And the aunt not unreasonably remains unconvinced.

Eventually, to cut a ridiculous plot as short as possible, Mr. Sealand discovers that Indiana is his long-lost daughter. Lucinda marries Bevil's friend Myrtle, who has been twice disguised in the course of the action, once personating an old lawyer, and once the rich old uncle of one of the other characters. Indiana of course marries Bevil, and the two characters of the sub-plot, Tom and Phyllis, valet to Bevil and maid to Lucinda respectively, marry also, as we are led to suppose.

There are some speeches in the last Act so supremely foolish that they are perhaps unsurpassed even in the later

golden age of Sentimental Comedy. Consider only this dialogue, immediately subsequent to Sealand's discovery that Indiana is his daughter:—

Isabella. If yet there wants an explanation of your wonder, examine well this face (yours, sir, I well remember), gaze on and read in me your sister, Isabella.

Mr. Sealand. My sister!

Isabella. But here's a claim more tender yet—your Indiana, sir, your long-lost daughter.

Mr. Sealand. Oh, my child! my child!

Indiana. All gracious Heaven! is it possible! do I embrace my father?

Mr. Sealand. And I do hold thee.—These passions are too strong for utterance. Rise, rise, my child, and give my tears their way.—Oh, my sister! [embraces her.]

Isabella. Now, dearest niece, my groundless fear, my painful cares no more shall vex thee. If I have wronged thy noble lover with too much suspicion, my just concern for thee, I hope, will plead my pardon.

Mr. Sealand. Oh! make him, then, the full amends, and be yourself the messenger of joy. Fly this instant! tell him all these wondrous turns of Providence in his favour. . . . Oh, my child! how are our sorrows past o'er-paid by such a meeting! Though I have lost so many years of soft paternal dalliance with thee, yet, in one day to find thee thus, and thus bestow thee, in such perfect happiness, is ample, ample reparation! And yet again, the merit of thy lover—

Indiana. Oh! had I spirits left to tell you of his actions! how strongly filial duty has suppressed his love; and how concealment still has doubled all his obligations; the pride, the joy of his alliance, sir, would warm your heart, as he has conquered mine.

Mr. Sealand. How laudable is love when born of virtue! I burn to embrace him.

Or again, let us consider, before we take leave of Steele's contributions to the Sentimental Comedy, this passage in

which, earlier in the play, Indiana justifies Bevil's support of her to the indignant Mr. Sealand :

Indiana. If you say this from what you think of me, you wrong yourself and him. Let not me, miserable though I may be, do injury to my benefactor. No, sir, my treatment ought rather to reconcile you to his virtues. If to bestow without a prospect of return ; if to delight in supporting what might, perhaps, be thought an object of desire, with no other view than to be her guard against those who would not be so disinterested ; if these actions, sir, can in a careful parent's eye commend him to a daughter, give yours, sir, give her to my honest, generous Bevil. What have I to do but sigh, and weep, and rave, run wild, a lunatic in chains, or, hid in darkness, mutter in distracted starts and broken accents my strange, strange story !

Against these we should set the scene in which Bevil refuses to fight a duel with his mistakenly jealous friend Myrtle. The scene is too long for quotation.

The Conscious Lovers gave rise to a considerable amount of discussion. Dennis wrote two pamphlets attacking it, and there were several written in defence.¹ It is noteworthy, in passing, that the play contains one curiously gross character, Cimberton, a coxcomb, who wants to marry Lucinda for her fortune. Cimberton's observations on marriage and on the person of the lady he intends to marry strike a false note in the piece. They were afterwards to some extent bowdlerized, but their introduction at all shows that Steele had not quite thrown off the yoke of Restoration comedy.

Besides *The Funeral*, *The Lying Lover*, *The Tender Husband*, and *The Conscious Lovers*, Steele wrote four Acts of a play to be called *The School of Action*. The piece, so far as it goes, is farcical to a degree, but by no means unamusing. It deals with two gentlemen who have the lease of a theatre,

¹ A synopsis of Dennis's first attack is given by Mr. Aitken in his preface to the Mermaid Edition of Steele's plays.

and a device of one of them, which consists in making the crabbed guardian of a young lady with whom he is in love put up, with his wife, in the theatre, imagining it to be an inn, and then frightening them with theatrical ghosts into giving back some misappropriated money. There is some fun, in Steele's best vein, when the two lessees examine the capability of various applicants for positions 'on the boards'. There is, for instance, a tragedian who cannot and will not recite some bombastic stuff which he has by heart unless he wears a long robe, has a truncheon to wave, and makes an entry to the sound of military music. They strip him of this outward show, and the poor man stops short in his 'Clidamira oh ! oh ! oh !' with a groan and confesses his inability 'to follow either love or war without some equipage.'

Steele has also left a part of an Act of a comedy or farce to be called *The Gentleman*, dealing with high life below stairs. It looks as if it would have been more amusing than the Townley-Garrick play of that name, which certainly owes its main idea to Steele's fragment and his paper—No. 88—in *The Spectator*. Neither *The School of Action* nor *The Gentleman* seems likely to have developed into a regular sentimental comedy of the type of *The Conscious Lovers*. Of this last play Professor Ward says: 'With it English comedy sank into the tearful embrace of artificiality and weakness from which it has never again altogether torn itself away.

As this paper is intended to deal with the Sentimental Comedy as well as with Steele's share in it, it seems necessary to mention some names which were thought famous in its later development. The most successful sentimental play in Garrick's age was Moore's *The Gamester*, written specially for Garrick. Of *The Gamester* Mr. Birrell

has said, in his *Obiter Dicta*, that it was the kind which makes an actor's reputation. There was nothing in it but what Garrick was responsible for. Moore died in 1757. Arthur Murphy (1727–1801), Whitehead (1714–85) with his *School for Lovers*, and Hugh Kelly (1714–85, *False Delicacy*, &c.) handed on the feeble lamp, and pleased their contemporaries. The most successful efforts of the elder George Coleman (1733–94) had in them something of the spirit of genuine comedy. Such, for instance, are his *Jealous Wife* and *The Clandestine Marriage*, written in collaboration with Garrick. General Burgoyne (died 1792) has something of the style of Sheridan, but is of course without his brilliancy. Neither Goldsmith himself nor even Sheridan is altogether free from the insincere sentiment of the school they despised.

The last conspicuous figure of the Sentimental Comedy is Richard Cumberland (1732–1811), a dealer in sentimental morality and comic characters who talk in dialects. Cumberland has a laudable seriousness of aim. He thought, he tells us, to do something to consolidate the different races of which our Empire is composed, by putting on the stage old Scotch servants (who talk indifferent Scotch but have very good hearts), comic Irishmen, Welshmen, and so forth. This, perhaps, gives one an insight into his sense of what is humorous. He had a treacherous memory, which led him to imagine that he was writing original matter when he was really drawing upon a reminiscence of some one else's work that he had either seen or read. He is the Sir Fretful Plagiary of Sheridan's *Critic*. The Sentimental Comedy did not end with Cumberland. It is still a stock commodity of our stage managers. But after Cumberland's time it ceased to maintain its former undisputed place in the Public's favour. With Cumberland, then, we may conclude our history.

II

LADY WINCHELSEA

THERE are certain among the ranks of English writers whose names are remembered and loved, because there is a flavour about them, ‘a kind of perfume in the mention’, suggestive of charming personalities, which makes them sound sweeter, and have a ‘finer relish to the ear’ than those of wider and higher renown. Such names are those of many of Lamb’s best loved favourites, and such too is the name of the ‘gentle Ardelia’, Anne, Countess of Winchelsea.

The interest in the study of her writings does not lie primarily in an appreciation of the poetically beautiful in them. She is famous as the writer of a few poems in a style not popular in her own day, but the real poetry in her works might be collected in a very few pages. Neither is she important in the historical development of our literature, for she was not a sufficiently great writer to be counted as an influence in changes of literary taste; but her poems, unpolished and commonplace though many of them undoubtedly are, reveal a character whose charm and delicate originality make her dear as a friend to the hearts of her readers.

Anne Finch was born in 1661, and died in 1720. In 1683 she became one of the six maids of honour to Mary of Modena—Catherine Sedley and Anne Killigrew being two of the others. Whilst in London she made the acquaintance of Mr. Heneage Finch, and in 1684 was

married to him. The wording of her marriage licence shows us a very human side of the young maid of honour. In this document she is described as 'a spinster, aged about eighteen years, at her own disposal'. Inexorable dates make it clear that she cannot have been less than twenty-three at the time, but Anne must have been fully aware of the prejudices of her time, when fourteen to eighteen was the marriageable age, and by the use of the 'about' she commits herself to nothing, and salves her conscience.

After her marriage, she left the service of Mary of Modena, but still lived in London, enjoying a home life of perfect happiness and contentment with a husband to whom she was most unfashionably devoted. In 1688, however, Heneage Finch, refusing to take the oath of allegiance, was forced to retire from public life; and in 1690 they finally left London and settled at Eastwell, the home of their nephew, the Earl of Winchelsea: there they passed their time in peaceful and perfect content, and Lady Winchelsea has given us in her poems several pictures of their daily life at the house and her long rambles among the delights and loveliness of the park.

By means of versified letters, she introduces us to the circle of her friends. She was fond of writing as an amusement, but in a poem 'In praise of the invention of letters' she finds also a practical utility in the Art.

Had these conveyances been then in date,
Joseph had known his wretched father's state
Before a famine, which his life pursues,
Had sent his other sons to tell the news.

Ardelia's personal poems have nothing of the taint of insincerity so common in the conventional and fulsome eulogy of the time; they are stamped with the hall-mark of perfect genuineness, and make known to us a company of

sweet-natured, quick-witted, lovable women, and upright, courteous men, with cultivated tastes and refined manners. Certainly no Jeremy Collier would have been needed if the court ladies and gallants had been like these, and the contrast is inevitable between the social life of the time as we find it portrayed in her poems, and the same life as it is pictured in the pages of contemporary writers, such as Pope or Addison. Perhaps she saw only the best in her friends and ignored their failings, or perhaps these portraits as truly represent the times as do those of Chloe, Atossa, and Sappho, and she merely brings to light a side of eighteenth-century life which was hidden from the other writers.

Lady Winchelsea, however, was not a recluse cut off from the fashionable world, and caring nothing about the doings of the great ones of her time. She was known as a poetess to many of the wits of the age, and her relations with Pope show her to have been less indifferent to criticism than she claimed to be. Wishing to have his opinion on one of her plays, she adopted a very feminine way of obtaining it, and sent him an invitation to dinner, to be followed by a reading of the play. Pope did not enjoy it, but, as on another such occasion which he describes in the 'Epistles',

sat with sad civility and read
With honest anguish and an aching head.

At any rate a reading of one of Lady Winchelsea's plays must have nearly exhausted Pope's stock of 'sad civility', and it is surprising to find that author and guest parted on good terms. Later, however, she was not to escape the acid sharpness of Pope's pen; she became one of the 'female wits' so hated and despised at the time, and laid herself

open to attack by writing against the pettiness of the life interests of the average woman.

Alas, a woman that attempts the pen,
Such an intruder on the rights of men,
Such a presumptuous creature is esteemed,
The fault can by no virtue be redeemed.
They tell us we mistake our sex and way:
Good breeding, fashion, dancing, dressing, play,
Are the accomplishments we should desire;
To write, to read, to think, or to inquire
Would cloud our beauty and exhaust our time,
And interrupt the conquests of our prime.

Miss Reynolds, in her preface to the complete poems of Lady Winchelsea, illustrates from a study of the contemporary drama how truly this is the opinion of the time. Throughout the century the 'female wit' is held up on the stage as a butt for ridicule or even insult. We find portraits such as that of Lady Knowell in Mrs. Aphra Behn's Sir Patient Fancy, who finds 'there is much volubility and vicissitude in mundane occurrences', and only obtains relief from these haunting thoughts in an effusive devotion to the classics. 'Oh, the delight of books! I always employ my leisure hours in reading. If serious, 'tis Tacitus, Seneca, or Plutarch's morals, or some such useful author. If in an humour gay, I am for poetry, Virgil, Homer, or Tasso.'

Or there is the heroine of Wright's *Female Virtuoso*, who has a leaning towards science, and wishes to introduce a 'mathematicall engin' to keep the streets of London dry and free from mud. "'Tis but setting up timber posts all round the city, and then fixing a pair of bellows on every one of 'em to blow the clouds away.'

Pope and Gay, in a farce called *Three Hours After Marriage*, have taken Lady Winchelsea as the model for

a picture of another such ‘petticoat author’. Phoebe Clinket is a lady much given to the writing of verses, who, in fear lest any of her thoughts should perish, keeps a maid to follow her about with writing materials strapped on her back. She enters, accompanied by the maid, and the following dialogue takes place :—

Maid. I had as good carry a raree show about the street.
Oh, how my back aches !

Ph. What are the labours of the back to those of the brain ? Thou scandal to the Muses ! I have now lost a thought worth a folio by thine impertinence.

Maid. Have I not got a crick in my back already with lifting your great books ?

Ph. Folios call them, and not great books, thou monster of impropriety. But hold :

The roaring seas o'er the tall woods have broke,
And whales now perch upon the sturdy oak.

What feast for fish, oh, too luxurious treat,
When hungry dolphins feed on butcher's meat.'

Enter Mrs. Townley.

Ph. Madam, excuse this absence of mind. My animal spirits had deserted the avenues of my senses, and retired to the recesses of the brain to contemplate a beautiful idea. I could not force the vagrant creatures back again into their posts, to move those parts of the body which express civility.'

This portrait, needless to say, is a gross libel on Lady Winchelsea, but it expresses the attitude of the drama, which is the attitude of the nation's mind, towards women writers, and is very typical of the eighteenth century. Other more serious criticisms of Ardelia, though slight, are always favourable, and even Pope himself marks her as the ‘bright star’ among ‘female wits’. Her fame, however, soon died, and until Wordsworth revived some interest in her Nature poems she hardly seems to have been known

or read at all. There is one reference to her at the end of the eighteenth century, which is interesting as showing that, at any rate, some of her poems were remembered, though the memory of their writer was dead. Anna Seward in 1763, writing at the age of fifteen to a friend, 'the morning star of whose youth is with difficulty escaping from the unwholesome mists of a foolish love affair', writes thus :

This brings to my recollection a pleasing little poem, to which in infancy I have often listened with delight from the lips of my mother, who used frequently to repeat it as she sat at work. It was mine, as it was hers, by oral tradition, before I attained my tenth year. Its easy and tuneful numbers charmed, and with a great deal of giddy vivacity on a thousand occasions, I had yet an inherent fondness for seeing the perspective of opening life through the clare-obscure of a meditative fancy, particularly when the sombre tints were ultimately prevalent.

She then quotes Lady Winchelsea's 'Progress of Life', adding a detailed criticism of its merits, and finding in it 'a lack of polished accuracy', 'one inadmissible inversion', and 'some failures in the matter of verbal perspicuity'.

Beyond a few scattered references to her poems in books of extracts, we do not hear anything further of the progress of Ardelia's fame, until Wordsworth practically rediscovered her and wrote his criticism in the letters to Dyee. He loved her for the sweet simplicity of her love of Nature, and in an album of extracts from eighteenth-century poets which he made for Lady Mary Lowther, and which has only recently been found, he devotes a third of his space to selections from Lady Winchelsea's poems.

From these selections we can learn all that is poetically beautiful in her writings, but we get no idea of their variety. She was not merely the authoress of a few

Nature poems ; she tried her hand at almost all the then fashionable types of literary composition—religious verse, songs, satires, epistles, and fables. Her poems are the simple reflection of her character. She was a creature of moods, sometimes sad, sometimes gay, and her poetry is full of variety of tone and shades of feeling. From her religious writings we see that she had a definite philosophy of life. It teaches moderation in all things :

No joy a rapture must create,
No grief beget despair ;

and though she herself was of a melancholy temperament, she was far from the rigid righteousness of the Puritan, as we can see from her frivolous lines on ‘The Punch Bowl.’

From the park and the play,
And Whitehall, come away
To the Punch Bowl, by far more inviting.
For the fops and the beaux
Leave those dull empty shows,
And see here what is truly delighting.

She turns instinctively from the lifeless moral doctrine of the time to a more vital belief that

Affliction is the line which every saint
Is measured by, his stature taken right;

though she draws a picture of the glamour and delights of the world and the flesh when she exclaims :

Since past and future we at distance see,
And present time can only useful be,
Voluptuous and in pleasures let us live,
And freely spend what moments we receive.
Still let us gay and warm affections hold,
And when in age forget that we are old.
Roses about our youthful tresses lie ;
Roses shall, when they fall, their place supply.

This point of view, however, she condemns unhesitatingly as the work of the ‘ industrious devil ’, and she herself lived

in an atmosphere of mystical thought, which approaches more nearly in spirit to the enthusiasm of the later religious reformers.

But this is only one side of her character, and it is more interesting to note her attitude to the society of the town from which she had cut herself off. Here, as we may imagine, she appears in the character of satirist, not with the stinging lash of a Pope or a Swift, but wielding the rod with a sureness and severity which show us that the 'gentle' Ardelia was capable of expressing her views with caustic wit. She does not set out to be a reformer, but she feels herself to be hostile to all existing social and literary ideals, and she has a quick eye and a ready tongue for those who fall below her standard. Particularly she attacks the woman of her age, and paints her as she was, with really bitter satiric touches, and no softening of her harsh and unlovely black outline. In a portrait such as that of Almeria, we can recognize the type of woman who is now taken as typical of the eighteenth century—the sister to Belinda and Leonora—whose toilet table is her altar, and whose deepest emotion is a hunger and thirst after the admiration of the beaux. Lady Winchelsea, on a visit to London, meets her in the street, and is shamed by the manner of her greeting :—

With a loud welcome, and a strict embrace,
Kisses on kisses in a public place.

They ride together in a coach, Lady Winchelsea shrinking from the gaze of the crowd, while Almeria

Through every glass her several graces shows,
This does her face and that her form expose
To envying beauties and admiring beaux.
One stops, and as expected, all extols,
Clings to the door, and on his elbow lolls,

Thrusts in his head, at once to view the fair
And keep his hair from discomposing air.

Again, in a poem 'Adam Posed', Lady Winchelsea might almost have been writing on Pope's text that 'women have no characters at all':—

Could our first father at his toilsome plough,
Thorns in his path and labour on his brow,
Cloth'd only in a rude unpolished skin,
Could he a vain fantastic nymph have seen
In all her airs, in all her antick graces,
Her various fashions and more various faces,
How had it posed that skill, which late assigned
Just appellations to each several kind,
A right idea of the sight to frame,
To have hit the wavering form, and given this *thing* a name.

Ardelia is modesty itself on the subject of her own fame, and declares that

Should my friends excuses frame,
And beg the critics not to blame
(Since from a female hand it came)
Defects in judgement, or in wit,
They'd but reply—then has she writ?

But she does not scruple to condemn the existing lifeless forms of poetry, and in the fable of 'The Critic and the Writer of Fables' she parodies the fashionable styles of heroic and pastoral poetry. The critic exclaims:—

I'm sick of Troy, and in as great a fright
When some dull pedant would her wars recite,
As was soft Paris when condemned to fight.

When the poet suggests a pastoral, he cries pathetically:—

Oh stun me not with those insipid dreams,
The eternal hush and lullaby of streams.

Perhaps one of the most remarkable poems of the eighteenth century is Lady Winchelsea's 'Fanscombe Barn.' It is a mock heroic in the style of Milton—a popular form at the time, but it has for subject a treatment of common tramp life. These tramps are no polite and polished swain and nymph : they are in very truth 'jolly beggars'. They live the same free outdoor life as those of Burns, singing :—

A fig for those by law protected ;
Liberty's a glorious feast.

They are just as free from any sense of moral obligation :—

Life is all a variorum,
We regard not how it goes ;
Let them cant about decorum,
Who have characters to lose.

Strolepedon and his Budgeta lie and steal and drink and brag with perfect self-satisfaction. They come in the evening to the barn, and take possession of it for the night :

Nor food was wanting to the happy pair,
Who with meek aspect and precarious tone
Had moved the hearts of hospitable dames
To furnish such repast as Nature craves.

Next comes the 'swarthy bowl', and

Into the strong profundity he throws
The floating healths of ladies blith and young.

Soon the 'spirituous Nectar'

. . . gliding now through every cherished vein,
New warmth diffused, new cogitations bred
With self-conceit of persons and of parts.
While Strolepedon (late distorted wight)
Limb wanting to the view, and all misshaped,
Permits a pinioned arm to fill the sleeve
Erst pendant, void and waving in the wind ;
The timber leg obsequiously withdraws,
And gives to that of bone precedence due.

A poem such as this could only have been written by one who knew and loved the country and its people, and it is chiefly as a writer about Nature and simple country life that Lady Winchelsea is known to-day. As Mr. Gosse says in his essay on 'Gossip in a Library':

She was the solitary writer of actively developed romantic tastes between Marvell and Gray, and she was not strong enough to create an atmosphere for herself within the vacuum in which she languished.

She lived at a time when women in the fashionable world looked upon life away from the bustle and excitement of the court and town as a living entombment. Again, we have only to turn to the contemporary drama to see the polite attitude. Isabella, in Dryden's *Wild Gallant*, says:—

I cannot abide to be in the country, like a wild beast in the wilderness.

A heroine of Littleton's finds existence in the country

Supinely calm and dully innocent;

while Young's Fulvia prefers the smoke, and dust, and noise, and crowds to 'those odious larks and nightingales'.

We can gather from these expressions that it was a very strange and novel idea for a woman in London to sigh:—

Oh, for my groves, my country walks and flowers;
Trees blast not trees, nor flowers envenom flowers.

Lady Winchelsea is absolutely sincere in her longing for the quiet and beauty of country life, but her treatment of Nature shows an extraordinary combination of eighteenth-century convention and really loving and minute observation. It is only those parts of Nature which she really knows

that she can describe with any vividness. In her home at Eastwell, for instance, seas and mountains were unknown to her, and wherever she mentions them in her poetry it is invariably in a cold and lifeless way, with no sense of the mystery and force and glory of their being. It is when she can paint from personal knowledge and love, can 'keep her eye fixed on the object', can describe simply and unaffectedly her delight in the wonder and beauty of her home, that she loses the cold and conventional attitude of her age, and 'sees into the life of things'.

It is in descriptions of trees and flowers and birds that Lady Winchelsea excels. At Eastwell she loved the forest. It awakened all the spirit of romance in her, and she delighted to wander all day in its 'green shade'. Her feeling for the 'numerous brethren of the leafy kind' is almost one of personal friendship: she becomes intimate with certain groups or individual trees, and it is worthy of note that Wordsworth borrowed the epithet 'fraternal', which he applies to the Borrowdaile yew trees, from Lady Winchelsea's description of a clump of oaks.

She treats flowers in the same way, not with the conventional enthusiasm for their colour, but loving them especially for their smell and describing them simply and directly, with no vain trappings of simile or metaphor to spoil their beauty. She mentions as her favourites flowers of which we hear very little in the eighteenth century—wild roses and 'sleepy cowslips', blue cornflowers and 'glowing poppies', and foxgloves which streak the woods with their pale red in the evening light.

She is equally minute and realistic in her portrayal of birds. In the fable of the 'Owl describing her young ones', she gives a charmingly exact picture of the little owls. The mother, anxious to secure the safety of her daughters,

asks the eagle to watch over them. She is loud in praise of their beauty :—

You'd joy to see the pretty souls,
With waddling steps and frowzy poles,
Come creeping from their secret holes.

But I ne'er let them take the air,
The fortune hunters do so stare—
And heiresses indeed they are.

I hope I've done their beauties right,
Whose eyes outshine the stars by night ;
Their muffs and tippets, too, so white.

The eagle promises, but seeing the young owls come forth to play :

What are these things, and of what sex,
At length he cries, with vulture's becks
And shoulders higher than their necks ?
No brightness in their eyes is seen,
But through the film a dusky green,
And like old Margery is their mien.

He forthwith thinks they must be designed for his supper, and makes his evening meal off them.

There is another charming and original description of some doves. The dove, whose usual role in poetry is to stand for a type of ‘cooing conjugal content’, Lady Winchelsea must have watched carefully, and he becomes in the poem an almost Chaucerian fowl, worthy to rank with Chaunticleer and his ‘faire dameysele Partelote’. Strutting before his dwelling, and about to choose a mate, he

Now murmurs soft, then with a rowling note,
Extends his crop, and fills his amorous throat ;
On every side accosts the charming fair,
Turns round, and bows with an enticing air :
She, carelessly neglecting all his pain,
Or shifts her ground, or pecks the scattered grain.

But on the appearance of a rival, her mask of cold indifference is cast aside :

Smooth every clinging plume with anger lies,
and she furiously flies at the many-coloured throat of the
newly-favoured one.

In a far-off and undeveloped way Lady Winchelsea also foreshadows the later idea of the relation of Man and Nature. She condemns those ‘syllables of senseless dolour’, as Dr. Johnson describes the elegiac verse which represents Nature as suffering with man in grief, and points out that Nature

Pursues her settled path, her fixed and steady course,
while the heart of Man is the home of sorrow :

From whence alone proceed those gathering clouds
Which every outward beauty shrouds,
—a position which is not far removed from that of Coleridge in the ‘Ode to Dejection’.

Nature-poetry such as this is indeed a faint and far-sounding echo of that of the poets of the Romantic Revival. Lady Winchelsea’s thought and expression are weak and ineffectual if we compare them directly with that of Wordsworth or Coleridge, but something of the same spirit inspired her which glows over the Nature-poetry of the nineteenth century. All her poetry reflects the character of a sweet and lovable woman, and is dear for that reason, but in her best moments she attains to something poetically higher, to the ‘wise passiveness’ of Wordsworth, the power of ‘fixing an exquisite regard on the commonest facts of Nature, and of interpreting them, not allegorically but actually in their relation to human life.’

III

FIELDING'S JONATHAN WILD

THE real Jonathan Wild was a prince among thieves, in an age when thieves of all kinds,—highwaymen, receivers of stolen goods, or pickpockets,—flourished exceedingly until they happened to be hanged. Pope mentioned the famous Wild; Defoe published an account of him; the ‘Grub Street’ authors wrote memoirs in which even the exaggerations are a tribute to the man’s daring and success. A life printed by Dicey in 1725, the year of the execution at Tyburn, represents how Wild, and the lady who is politely called his wife, lived in great splendour on the spoils of his Machiavellian genius. Unlike Fagan, his successor in a less picturesque age, he kept the state befitting a great commander, a ruler not the less exalted because his army was a gang of robbers. His home was filled with pictures and plate; the livery of his footmen was finely laced. He was rich enough to provide the very pickpockets under him with all that occasion might require. A dancing master employed by him gave lessons in deportment to those whose business it was to steal fans and snuff-boxes at a ball. Once, so runs the story, a ‘gentleman’ of his service was furnished with complete equipage, coach and horses and lackeys, for a journey to court, to pick the King’s own pocket! It is an undoubted fact that Wild had close relations with the world of legitimate authority and fashion. When a magistrate wrote a pamphlet exposing his knavery, he wrote a pamphlet exposing the

magistrate's corruption. Noblemen were among his clients in that very lucrative branch of his business—the recovery of stolen goods. The most concise and sober of the biographies show how conveniently genteel folk might deal with a man whose manners and perfect discretion would allow him to receive no pay, but only a free gift in return for favours done. To the subsequent ingratitude of these customers, when his genius was confined to the limited sphere of Newgate, allusion is made in an elegy entitled the 'Complaint of Jonathan Wild':—

Ye Britons ! curs'd with an unthankful mind,
For ever to exalted merit blind,
Is thus your constant Benefactor spurned ?
Are thus his faithful services returned ?
This Dungeon his Reward for Labours past,
And Tyburn his full recompense at last ?

But sure, e'er long, the time will come again,
When watches shall be lost in Drury Lane,
Snuff Boxes, finely painted, miss their way,
And Rings and Pocketbooks shall go astray ;
When 'Phyllis' at the Ball or Masquerade
Shall lose a present by some lover made ;
Then you—unthinking Monsters !—you, that now
Exalt at my unhappy overthrow,
Then you'll repent too late ; you then in vain
Will wish to have your Jonathan again.

These verses appear in the biography, probably the most authentic of all, which follows the report of Wild's trial at the Session House in the Old Bailey. The Act against receiving stolen goods, which had been levelled against Wild's practices, finally brought them to an end. The warrant, on which he was arrested, accused him of having formed 'a kind of corporation of thieves, of which he was Director'; and said 'that he had divided the town into

districts, and appointed district gangs for each, who regularly accounted to him for their robberies.' At the trial, the prisoner behaved with his usual impudence. It had been his custom to betray the unruly members of his gang to the police ; thus preserving due order, and adding the welcome blood-money to his riches. He now prepared lists showing how great a number of thieves had been caught by him, and distributed these lists to plead his cause among the jury. But the court was not moved by his services on behalf of Justice ; sentence of death was pronounced, and in spite of an attempt to cheat the gallows by drinking laudanum, the great captain-general of London's thieves died as meanly as any wretch who had stolen his five shillings' worth of clothing or food.

The description of Wild's attempted suicide reveals the high pretensions of the Newgate hero. 'The evening before he suffered', records the Ordinary, 'he inquired how the noble Greeks and famous Romans who slew themselves, came to be so glorious in history, if self-murder be a crime.' Fielding was acquainted with the Ordinary's account : we can imagine with what satisfaction he read a passage so agreeable to his satirical genius. In the reign of George II, the most guileless could appreciate a comparison between a street rogue and a politician in power ; all London applauded when, in Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, the Catch-Thief Peachum sang :—

The statesman, because he is great,
Thinks his trade as honest as mine ;
but only Fielding, successor to Swift, could take, and amplify, a hint which connected a thief hung at Tyburn with the heroes of the ancient world. The idea supplied by these biographies of Wild remained in Fielding's memory. He wrote in *The Champion* for March, 1740, 'Actions have sometimes been attended with Fame, which were undertaken

in Defiance of it. Jonathan Wild himself had for many years no small share of it in this Kingdom'. Three years later, in April, 1743, Fielding published his *Miscellanies* by subscription, and the third volume contained that unsparing satire on false greatness—*The History of the Life of the late Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great*.

The book belongs to a most important period of Fielding's life—a period of change for the writer and the man. In 1743 Fielding was thirty-six. It was fifteen years since he had dedicated his first comedy to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, his cousin. The hopes he then entertained of success and wealth had not been realized. Sir Robert Walpole had not given him the place for which he half-jestingly asked.¹ Instead of the patronage, he had experienced the enmity of the powerful minister. His *Pasquin* and

¹ In 'An Epistle' dedicated to Sir Robert Walpole, Fielding humorously suggests that he, the poor poet, is the greater man of the two :—

The family that dines the latest,
Is in our street esteemed the greatest ;
But latest hours must surely fall
'fore him, who never dines at all.
We're often taught, it doth behoove us
To think those greater, who're above us ;
Another instance of my glory,
Who live above you twice two storey,
And from my garret can look down
On the whole street of Arlington.

The writer's creditors increase his prestige ;
Greatness by poets still is painted
With many followers acquainted :
This too doth in my favour speak ;
Your levee is but twice a week ;
From mine I can exclude but one day,
My door is quiet on a Sunday.

However, the bard is willing to adjust the inequality :—
If with my greatness you're offended,
The fault is easily amended ;
For I'll come down with utmost ease,
Into whatever place you please.

Historical Register—plays satirizing the political corruption of the day—had hastened the passing of the ‘Licensing Act’, and put an end to his career as a dramatist. He had returned to his earlier legal studies, and by 1740 had begun to add a lawyer’s meagre fees to what income his occasional writings could afford him. His purse, always too empty—and the lack was due more than is commonly remembered to ill-luck and a generous heart—was now supporting the wife he loved, and those ‘little creatures’, as he always calls them, his children. He was still in the prime of manhood ; still ‘so formed for happiness’, to use Lady Mary’s fine phrase, ‘that it is a pity he was not immortal’ ; and still, I fear, needing the occasional forgiveness of his ‘Amelia’. But the severest moralist could no longer identify him with the reckless young Fielding of the picturesque stories. ‘When I look backward’, he says in the preface to the *Miscellanies*, ‘and survey the accidents which have befallen me, and the distresses I have waded through whilst I have been engaged on these works, I could almost challenge some philosophy in myself for having been able to finish them.’ Fielding’s youth may have been as prodigal as gossip is delighted to remember. It matters little to us, who are concerned with Fielding the novelist. He had now entered upon his mature life ; a life full of care, of patient and courageous hard work. He had come to know the great world of statesmen and fine lords, and the ‘vulgar’ under-world where the honest poor, and the rogues, and the lawyers and officers of justice—good men or bad—all rubbed shoulders together. Neither great folk nor low could wear a mask to deceive him ; and all the knowledge that varying fortune had taught him lay at the service of his witty and ironical pen.

To expose the ‘bombast’ greatness, unworthy of any higher name than selfishness, which flourishes in ‘cities,

courts, gaols, or such places' is the object of Fielding's satire in *Jonathan Wild*. The book is, in form, a novel of adventure, written in that mock-heroic strain which exhibits Fielding's irony at its best. Wild's proud achievements, during his unhesitating progress toward the gallows, are of themselves sufficient to hold our interest; but the narrative presents a relentless comparison between the hero-thief and the hero-tyrants and conquerors whom the world calls great: the action and the morality of the story are inseparably one. The author warns us in the preface that he will not attempt to give a faithful portrait of the historic Wild, but that his narrative is 'rather of such actions which he might have performed . . . than what he really did.' In certain particulars (such as the attack made on Wild by Blueskin, a fellow thief) and in the general nature of Wild's exploits and final downfall, biographical fact is adhered to; but Fielding's genius gathers the random adventures of a criminal's life into definite unity. Wild gains his preliminary schooling at the hands of Count La Ruse, a fellow who passes for a master-hand in stealing, cheating at cards, and the like arts, but who is soon excelled by his more talented pupil. The two rogues enter into league to bring about the ruin of an honest jeweller and his wife—the Heart-frees. It is in Wild's continued persecution of these simple folk, and in the mastery he obtains the while among his fellow criminals, that his hypocrisy, ruthlessness, and insatiable avarice—his 'greatness', in a word—are most perfectly revealed.

To the innocent reader, ill-read in the annals of Newgate, Wild's character may seem at first to be incredible. We feel inclined to take up Fielding's challenge and examine whether Wild does not represent, in spite of the author's denial, the 'perfection of diabolism'. Did his genius rob,

betray, and ruin, within the bounds of probability? We have only to turn back to the contemporary histories to answer this question. ‘His charity was to breed up children to be thieves; and several of these, his own foster-children, he has himself caused afterwards to be apprehended and hanged for the very crimes which he first taught them how to commit.’ So writes Defoe, and though it were rash to trust such an authority alone, the other biographers testify to Wild’s practice of delivering his rebellious subjects over to Mr. Ketch—‘pour encourager les autres’. It was not without due precedent that Fielding’s hero destroyed Blueskin, and Marybone, and Fierce. Moreover, his greatness was not without certain imperfections that belong to human nature. Although boldness and effrontery stood him in good stead at more than one critical moment, he sometimes found it necessary to have resource to that ‘true support of greatness in affliction, a bottle, by means of which he was enabled to curse, swear, and bully, and brave his fate.’ Once, with remarkable determination and strength of language, he leapt from an open boat to seek a grave in the sea; the haste with which he forthwith abandoned his resolution would certainly suggest human frailty, were it not—as Fielding explains—that his action was in obedience to the unscrutable purposes of Nature. Nature, having decreed that a thief must not cheat the gallows by drowning, ‘whispered in his ear to attempt the recovery of the boat, which call he immediately obeyed.’ More serious was Wild’s departure from his ideals when, in an hour of defeat and dejection, he pondered whether it would not have been better ‘to have observed the simple laws of friendship and morality than thus to ruin my friend for the benefit of others.’ He could only steel himself, then, by the recollection of that ‘inward glory, that consciousness of doing

great and wonderful actions, which can alone support the truly great man, whether he be a Conqueror, a Tyrant, a Statesman, or a Prig¹. Wild's conscience, which, as Fielding says, is the 'only incorruptible thing about a man', remained fitfully alive to the last. The condemnation of Heartfree so affected him that, for one unworthy moment, he was tempted to discover his own guilt to save the innocent jeweller. The villain whom Fielding portrayed would never have reformed like Smollett's melodramatic Count Fathom; but he never became an absolute Mr. Hyde.

Nor was it in moral character alone that Wild showed inconsistencies such as are found in even the greatest among mortals. His intelligence, though diabolically perfect in the main, had certain lamentable flaws. It was to be expected that he could not imagine honesty in others, and was thereby handicapped against an honest adversary; but it was matter for pity when his despised Count La Ruse, and even a poor creature of an hour like Molly Straddle, defeated him at his own game. However, the ladies who outwitted Wild only proved the superiority of their sex, to which Fielding paid a delicate tribute. Tishy, Jonathan's wife, was a woman that any hero (man or superman) might acknowledge truly and unashamedly as his better half. She more than equalled, I am sure, the half-dozen wives with whom history credits the original Wild. It is when angered by her taunts, or deceived by her actions, that Fielding's Jonathan appears in his most human aspect.

Because of these occasional shortcomings in Wild, we are all the more free to praise those scenes wherein he reaches his pinnacle of greatness as a thief and cheat. At times, Fielding allows his secret hatred and contempt of

¹ A thief.

the selfish wretch to burst into open expression, and disturb the calm mask of his irony. But he takes evident delight in portraying the ingenuity and boldness of his hero. A lawyer himself, he is able to lend a fearless plausibility to some of Wild's most hateful arguments—as in the determination of what the word ‘honour’ means: ‘Is honour truth? No; it is not in the lie going from us, but in its coming to us, our honour is injured. Doth it then consist in what the vulgar call cardinal virtues? It would be an affront to your understandings to suppose it, since we see every day so many men of honour without any. In what then doth the word honour consist? Why, in itself alone. A man of honour is he that is called a man of honour; and while he is so called, he so remains, and no longer.’ Or, to take another instance of Wild’s powers of dialectic, examine the reasons urged in behalf of murder: ‘Is it not more generous, nay, more good-natured, to send a man to his rest, than, after having plundered him of all he hath, or from malice or malevolence deprived him of his character, to punish him with a languishing death, or, what is worse, a languishing life?’ Wild’s ideal method of ‘cheating the very tools who are our instruments to cheat others’ is one that may displease the sensitive reader, but it could not fail to excite the interest, if not the admiration, of some of our modern business-men. The corrupt politician of to-day could find no model more perfect than this demagogue, who gains supremacy among his fellows in prison by one eloquent speech. ‘Gentlemen, the Liberty of Newgate is at stake’, begins his oration; and it is not long before the rival leader is deposed, and Jonathan arrayed in the tinsel night-gown, waistcoat, and cap that are symbolical of command.

The irony and power with which Wild is portrayed makes us regard him with more pleasure than horror.

Contrast Jonathan with Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, whose sordid character, drawn without the relief of humour, is not more real and is infinitely more depressing. Thackeray, in creating Barry Lyndon, followed the ironic style of Fielding, but his villain is too mean a creature to overcome our disdain. The force of Wild's personality at times masters us as we are mastered by Milton's Satan. We do not cry out, 'By God, I hope he'll win!', but we feel a personal satisfaction in the completeness of his knavery and renown. When, at the very gallows, Jonathan robs the Newgate Ordinary, and carries that worthy parson's bottle-screw out of the world in his hand, we are triumphantly thankful that, in spite of former weaknesses and defeats, the thief rises at the last to his ideal of greatness.

The character of that prison Ordinary who piously refused wine, but drank punch because 'it is nowhere spoken against in Scripture', has won praise from even those critics who most disparage this book. Gustave Planché, a French critic who, writing in 1832, represents the opinion of that day regarding *Jonathan Wild*, concludes a short review by saying: 'Après avoir fermé le volume, on ne conserve guère dans sa mémoire que le souvenir d'une seule scène, celle entre Jonathan et l'aumônier de Newgate'. But the persons who figure in this story are nearly all worthy to be remembered. They illustrate, even better perhaps than minor characters of the author's longer novels, Fielding's power of defining personality with marvellous rapidity. Bagshot makes his appearance in only a chapter or two, and yet we have a clear conception of him, and can despise his timidity in contrast with Wild's successful audacity, quite as though we knew him. We instantly appreciate why Fireblood, described even more briefly, is a man after Wild's own heart—certain to betray him. Is

there any tribute to Fielding's genius in my feeling that Snap, the bailiff, who merely crosses the stage, is the most disagreeable person in the story? Perhaps it is only a half-conscious aversion to those who have power to arrest. But who could fail to applaud the characters of this officer's two daughters—so humorously contrasted? The vigorous Tishy, Miss Laetitia, has already been admired; Miss Theodosia, more placid in disposition, is scarcely less worthy of regard. When first we are granted a near sight of her, Theodosia is engaged with thread and needle. Her occupation is 'in imitation of Penelope . . . only with this difference, that whereas Penelope unravelled by night what she had knit or wove or spun by day, so what our young heroine unravelled by day she knit again by night.' In short, she was mending a pair of stockings with red clocks'. The next time we hear domestic news of this lady is when she is safely delivered of a male infant. Wild, 'who had wonderful good nature when his greatness or interest was not concerned . . . asked with a smile, who was the father?' But Laetitia, now respectable as Jonathan's wife, reviles her sister in bitterest terms. Tishy's strength of language is alone sufficient to keep her character vital. That bedroom scene, where her tongue is nearly a match for her husband's, is as worthy to be remembered as the conversation between Wild and the Ordinary. It is a pity that I cannot quote a dialogue which is so good as to make one wonder why Fielding could not write better plays. But to the taunt that his wife had married him 'because it was convenient', Wild replied in language which might reasonably shock the reader, since the 'chaste Laetitia' herself could never forgive nor forget the accuracy with which she was described.

Perhaps it was the uncompromising realism, sparing the women of Wild's company no more than his cut-throats and

bullies, which caused Sir Walter Scott to describe *Jonathan Wild* as a ‘picture of complete vice, unrelieved by anything of human feeling, and never by any accident even deviating into virtue’. It is difficult to admit the justice of this opinion. It not only fails to appreciate the story’s moral—a moral so insisted upon that Taine indicates that the book is less a satire than a tract—but it takes no account of the innocent Heartfrees, and Friendly, and the good magistrate. The Heartfrees are not merely types of virtue, real only in so far as they affect the plot. Fielding loved such characters too heartily not to endow them with life; and it becomes a Wild, rather than ourselves, to call them fools. ‘It is not want of sense, but want of suspicion by which innocence is betrayed.’ Through the medium of the honest jeweller, the author is able to speak his thoughts with simple directness. When Heartfree insists that a virtuous Turk may be saved, and shocks the punch-drinking Ordinary by so unorthodox a sentiment, we listen to the tolerant philosopher who drew Parson Adams, and that worthy clergyman, Dr. Harrison. Heartfree, seeking comfort for the apparent ruin of all earthly hopes, rebukes the scepticism of the age in words that convince us of Fielding’s own consolations in religion. Furthermore, in picturing the affection of the Heartfrees towards one another and towards their children, Fielding gives an intimate glimpse into his own heart as husband and father. Tenderness is the least remembered quality of Fielding’s genius. He never represents the passionate nature of love. He watches the courtship of his youthful lovers—Tom Jones and Sophia, Andrews and Fanny—with a smile, kindly indeed, but not without its touch of satire. But his novels are not lacking in pathos. *Amelia* contains more than one beautiful and tender picture of married life—pictures most justly cele-

brated, and in *Jonathan Wild* there are scenes between Heartfree and his wife, Heartfree and his little children, which have scarcely less power to move us.

In describing these good people, it is inevitable that Fielding should depart to some extent from his prevailing tone of irony. It is true that the Heartfrees are introduced as 'low, weak, silly people'; and that their characters serve, more than they ever could mar, the purpose of the satire—for, by showing honest industry as pitiable in comparison with the exploits of a hero at war with society, false greatness lies mercilessly exposed to ridicule. But the apologies that are continually made for Heartfree's goodness tend to weary us; disparagement loses its force and its meaning. At times the irony is frankly abandoned, as in the chapter wherein Mrs. Heartfree is restored to her suffering husband—a chapter, it should be added, of exceptional power, so tersely are virtue and evil, love and cruelty forced into contrast. Nor is it only while in sympathy with the Heartfrees that Fielding discards sarcasm for plain speech. In a scene already quoted for its biting humour, where Tishy reviles her sister's want of chastity, the author, who must always have been chivalrous in spite of his transgressions, cannot refrain from adding that the fault 'should be either less criminal for a woman to commit, or more so in a man to solicit her to it'. However, it is as profitless as it is ungenerous to quibble about style in exceptional passages like these. The book as a whole is a masterpiece of relentless and unvarying irony—written, one might suppose, in one mood, and at a single sitting.¹ I cannot

¹ It is for this reason, among others, that I follow Mr. Gosse rather than Mr. Austin Dobson in regard to the debated question as to whether *Jonathan Wild*, although published subsequently to *Joseph Andrews*, was not the first written of the two books. The argument runs on the one hand as follows: the *Miscellanies* contain several

refrain from giving two examples to emphasize my praise. Jonathan Wild, at the outset of his career, is transported, or rather (I beg the author's forgiveness) *sent by* his father, on account of an 'unfortunate accident', to his Majesty's plantations in America. The elder Wild thought that travelling 'was travelling in one part of the world as well as another ; it consisted in being such a time from home, and in traversing so many leagues ; and he appealed to experience whether most of our travellers in France and Italy did not prove at their return that they might have been sent as profitably to Norway and Greenland'. So compositions that date from Fielding's first youth as an author. *Jonathan Wild*, as regards its form, belongs to the picturesque-parody type of novel ; it is unlikely that Fielding should have returned to that earlier form after having successfully introduced a 'new kind of writing' in *Joseph Andrews*—the literary precursor of *Tom Jones*. On the other hand, certain matters of detail—a letter signed Peter Pounce, a simile composed at Bath—point to *Joseph Andrews* as the earlier work. Mr. Dobson's conclusion is that *Jonathan Wild* was probably 'planned and begun' before *Joseph Andrews*. I find that conclusion unsatisfactory because, as I have said, the satire has the appearance of having been written under one governing emotion, which would not permit its progress to be interpreted by another composition. Mr. Gosse's opinion—that *Jonathan Wild* was substantially completed before *Joseph Andrews*—seems the more likely : the 'Bath simile' and the letter from Peter Pounce are most probably, as he says, only the marks of a final revision before publication.

Mr. Gosse attributes *Jonathan Wild* to the year 1740. It might be questioned whether the book may not belong to a still earlier time—the period of Fielding's greatest ill-luck, shortly after the passing of Walpole's 'Licensing Act'. Knightly, in discussing *Jonathan Wild*, suspected that Wild typified Walpole. Against such a theory there are several good objections. Fielding himself, on whose word we may safely rely, declared that his villain did not represent the features of any particular person. The satire, as in all Fielding's works, is directed primarily against the unscrupulous conqueror, rather than the politician. The reference to the original Wild in *The Champion* paper, already quoted, suggests that the idea which inspired the satire had not yet been developed into a book ; and the date of *The Champion* paper is March, 1740.

rapidly, and with so sly a pen, is the Grand Tour turned to ridicule. Then Fielding goes on to apologize for the shortness of this chapter. He would have borrowed the journals of several young gentlemen who have lately made the tour of Europe ; ‘but’, he explains, ‘to our great sorrow we could not extract a single incident strong enough to justify the theft to our conscience.’ Even the historian of a thief would rob ; even the writer adopts the language of knavery ! Fielding’s powers of irony are shown, in a manner still more telling, in the chapter ‘Of Hats’. Dissensions grew among the followers of Wild as to the different manners of wearing their hats. They divided into two parties : ‘those who wore their hats fiercely cocked’, called ‘cavaliers and rory tory ranter boys’ ; and those who wore the ‘brim flapping over their eyes’, who went by the ‘several names of wags, roundheads, shakebags, oldnolls, and several others . . . Between these, continual jars arose, insomuch that they grew in time to think that there was something essential in their differences, and that their interests were incompatible with each other, whereas in truth the difference lay only in the fashion of their hats’. Wild, who incontestably possessed one trait of greatness in his ability to disregard all hindering details in the pursuit of a grand end, rebuked their paltry quarrels with scorn :—‘Gentlemen, I am ashamed to see men embarked in so great and glorious an undertaking as that of robbing the public, so foolishly and weakly dissenting among themselves.’ Satire like this, mocking the party politics of the day, and reducing great things to small after the manner of Swift, moved Coleridge to declare that it exceeded anything in *Lilliput* or the *Tale of a Tub*. Indeed Fielding, because he does not continually protest like Swift, because he has too much cool common-sense to allow him, even in deadliest

attack, to strike blindly savage blows, is often a more dangerous adversary than his great, intemperate master.

In point of style, *Jonathan Wild* may challenge comparison with any masterpiece of prose satire. I would write with the same praise of its structure, were it not for the long interruption in the story, caused by Mrs. Heartfree's recital of her adventures by sea and land. The account of her trials occurs when the main plot is reaching its climax of interest ; we have caught sight of Tyburn tree, and, either from admiration or hatred, are anxious to press forward with the mob to the scene of Wild's final exaltation. Beyond doubt, it is necessary to gather together the stray ends of the story ; and it is pardonable in Fielding as a man of his time—in spite of his dislike of Richardsonian sentimentality—that he should deal exact measure of reward to the 'Virtuous and Innocent'. But the digression, however natural, is unpardonably long. I find greater fault with it than with that much-condemned 'Man of the Hill' digression in *Tom Jones* : for it does not occur in the pages of an easy-going novel, but in a satire, whose virtue is to be compact and brief. It adds no new thing to the purpose of that satire. Evil has been sufficiently unmasked in all its ugliness. The least sensitive reader grows disgusted and weary at a new succession of villanies. The character of Mrs. Heartfree herself suffers a little in our esteem, when we find that the wife who had scarcely gone abroad—except to the play with her little ones—is able to distinguish between the various types of scoundrels who threaten her. We are not pacified by reading in the author's preface that one chapter is visibly meant as a burlesque of extravagant travellers' tales, so much the literary fashion of the hour. The time for any light mockery is passed. A great satire, written in a tone of irony which is itself a strain upon the feelings,

has nearly attained its end. We are anxious to turn the final page, to lay our book down, and to reflect upon what we have read.

It is not possible to set *Jonathan Wild*, if we would seek a famous touchstone for its philosophy, in direct contrast with such a book as *Heroes and Hero Worship*. Fielding's satire only seeks to expose false heroes, whose ambitions benefit self alone, although the mere magnitude and fame of their achievements overawe the common multitude; while Carlyle's Essays seek to emphasize the services which true heroes render to mankind. Nevertheless, Fielding's general attitude towards society, as composed alike of great folk and little, may not unprofitably be compared with that of Carlyle. The two men have certain opinions in sympathy. They both equally hate all hypocrites and pretenders; they see, through all show and semblance, the man's real self; they scorn the merely respectable, the self-complacent, the lazy and inefficient; they denounce, with full belief in God and Christ, the irreligious and the pharisaical. Fielding would have joined Carlyle to welcome true greatness in a Robert Burns; Carlyle but followed Fielding's creed when he condemned the Napoleon of destructive conquests—the selfish victor of 'Austerlitzes and Wagrams'. On reading in *Amelia* that men are only justified in fighting 'in defence of their religion, their country, and their friend', the Scottish philosopher, although the biographer of Frederic the Great, might have nodded his head in assent. But Fielding's outlook upon the world of men differs radically from that of Carlyle: he would never have written history as Carlyle wrote it. In the preface to the *Miscellanies*, the author of *Jonathan Wild* apologizes for using the word 'greatness' in a contemptuous light, and acknowledges, of course, that greatness and goodness may co-exist in the

same person ; but, he continues, ‘ parts and courage are the efficient qualities of a great man ’, and ‘ benevolence, honour, honesty and charity ’ go to make the good man. . . . The ingredients which compose the former of these characters bear no analogy to, nor dependence on, those which constitute the latter. A man, therefore, may be great without being good, or good without being great.’ This division is sharp and simple enough to be almost childish ; but perhaps Carlyle might have profited by a division so clear. Is there not in his philosophy a confusing suggestion that might, if not of itself right, is nevertheless the divinely-appointed source of all right?—that the strong man, if like ‘ poor Napoleon ’ he turns wholly selfish, departs in that very moment from his true self as God created him ? On finishing *Heroes and Hero Worship* have we not been led to conclude that the strong are naturally the saviours of society ? Against this exaggeration it is well to oppose the warning of *Jonathan Wild*, that the strong are too often the destroyers of society. Furthermore, according to Carlyle, ‘ the history of what man has accomplished in this world is at bottom the history of the Great Men who have worked here.’ This theory would not, I think, have fully satisfied Fielding. A Socrates or a Shakespeare, he might have said, add to the world’s store of wisdom and delight as only the greatest men can do ; but it must never be forgotten that the little people, the Heartfrees and countless millions like them, all who toil day by day in fields and in cities, have their share—and a large share—in the progress of the world. When we regard humanity with Carlyle, our gaze is too much fixed on the great figures who occupy the foreground ; behind them, in half obscurity, the crowded ranks of men form but one mass. With Fielding, we pass in among the multitude ; we see that every group is composed

of individuals ; we realize that each man has his separate place.

Fielding, never a solitary idealist, but a man who lived among all sorts and conditions of men, recognized very clearly the interdependence which exists among human beings. His sense of our common interests and obligations —his ‘regimental’ attitude of mind—is apparent in all his writings. The *Essay on Conversation* (which, no less than the *Journal of the Voyage to Lisbon*, faithfully reveals Fielding’s character) shows how strongly he felt the duties which the individual owes toward society. Even in conventions of manners, in ‘ceremonies . . . which exist in form only, and have in them no substance at all’, he insisted upon the due regard that a man must pay to his brother, whether of high station or low. Charity, one can readily understand, was in his estimation the first of virtues. The value he attached to charity is seen from the moral of his greatest book ; Tom Jones must be forgiven all faults because of the kind heart that always prompted the helping hand. Self-interest was to Fielding the one unforgivable vice. He selected the man who thinks of himself alone—whether a Blifl, or a Wild, or some beau of forgotten title—as a type of the greatest uselessness and villainy. It is for this reason that, although a general’s son, and a patriot who hailed Marlborough as the preserver of England’s liberties, he denounced ruthless conquerors again and again. And not only an Alexander, but a Diogenes (representing the selfish and vain philosopher) was the object of his contempt. In a Dialogue between the two, the greatness of the world-famous victor is reduced to mischief ; and the greatness of the world-famous thinker is reduced to futility.

This philosophy which Fielding preached of the necessity of love and active service toward our fellows, was exempli-

fied in his life. We are ready to remember his frank and genial nature—that generous heart which betrayed him into temptation—we do not so often remember, as justice requires, that sense of duty, and capacity for hard work, which distinguished him as a lawyer and a magistrate. When, as Justice of the Peace, he became absorbed in the duties of his office, the author of *Tom Jones* and *Amelia* finally renounced the writing of novels. He turned his misfortunes, and no doubt his faults also, to wholly practical account, and wrote such works as the *Proposal for making an Effectual Provision for the Poor*, and the *Inquiry into the Causes of the late Increase of Robbers*. If, in early days, his play *The Historical Register*, by its immorality or its plain speaking—let the reader judge which—had given occasion to the Licensing Act; the *Inquiry into the Increase of Robbers*, which exposed the terrible evils of gin-drinking, helped greatly to pass the ‘Bill Restricting the Sale of Spirituous Liquors’. Fielding has always been honoured as one of the greatest novelists in the world’s literature; is it not right that he should be honoured, too, as a man who did active service for the community in which he lived? He merited the praise which is given by the splendid irony of *Jonathan Wild* to the ‘yeoman, the manufacturer, the merchant, and perhaps the gentleman’—men distinguishable from ‘great’ heroes and thieves, because they have regard to the benefit of society.

IV

THE LETTERS OF LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU

THE eighteenth-century letter is typically practical and descriptive, not imaginative; but we have to go to very various correspondences to get any general view of the letter-writing of the period. At a time when the familiar spirit was entering literature, every person of a certain culture wrote to his friends letters that differed from *Tatler* or *Spectator* essays but in their still greater familiarity. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu described her travels or laid bare with malicious cleverness the weaknesses of a world she professed to hate; Pope schemed for a literary reputation; Dr. Johnson cultivated 'the endearing elegance of female friendship', or on one occasion at least, used his epistolary art for purposes of indignation; the letters of Gray and Cowper are a revelation of poetic temperament, and come almost before poetry dared, as the signs of an imaginative revival.

Lady Mary's letters belong to the social history of the day; they are the proper complement to the volumes of Walpole and Chesterfield. She represents 'the Town' with the pen of one of its wittiest members; eighteenth-century society, seen through a sympathetic medium. She is interested before all else in things as they are, and this is the secret of the good letter. She is honest and downright, sometimes a better social letter-writer even than Walpole; her anecdotes are never far-fetched; her comments have a rapid wisdom, piercing to motives

with an instinct personal and feminine; but she has none of the passion for reform.

Lady Mary was conscious enough of the merits of her letters, and she herself re-edited a certain number for publication. A biography may still be gathered out of them. She was born in 1689, and educated in the country by promiscuous reading in the library of her father, Evelyn Pierrepont (afterwards Duke of Kingston). Gifted with a strong intelligence, she came to be noticeable for erudition amongst the women of her time. On the whole, she carries her learning well. With correspondents such as Pope she delights in Latin quotations, in translating a Turkish poem, in telling how she is 'pretty far gone in Oriental learning'; but she had enough real taste to make her learning her own. In Adrianople she writes: 'I no longer look upon Theocritus as a romantic writer; he has only given a plain image of the way of life amongst the peasants of his country.... I don't doubt, had he been born a Briton, his *Idylliums* had been filled with descriptions of threshing and churning...' Except where she flatters Pope, who had, as she suggestively puts it, 'drawn the golden current of Pactolus to Twickenham', her criticism of contemporary writers is very shrewd. She is nearly alone amongst the women of her date duly to appreciate Fielding; and at the age of fifty, on the arrival from England of a box of books, she confesses to sitting up the whole night over his latest novels. On at least one aspect of Richardson she wrote the last word common-sense can say: 'Richardson is as ignorant in morality as he is in anatomy'; and, again, 'He has no idea of the manners of high life'. His Harriet's whole behaviour Lady Mary condemns as ridiculous: 'She follows the maxim of Clarissa of declaring all she thinks to all the people she sees, without reflecting

that in this mortal state of imperfection fig leaves are as necessary for our minds as our bodies . . .’ For another criticism of Richardson this too is effective enough : ‘ I was such an old fool as to weep over *Clarissa Harlowe*, like any milkmaid of sixteen over the ballad of the Lady’s Fall.’

When Lady Mary reached an age to theorize about a woman’s learning, strong sense united with experience made her urge her daughter, the Countess of Bute to give real instruction to her own children. But Lady Mary always adds wise cautions. Her eldest granddaughter is not to think herself learned when she can read Latin or even Greek. ‘ Languages are more properly to be called vehicles of learning than learning itself, as may be observed in many schoolmasters, who though perhaps critics in grammar, are the most ignorant fellows upon earth.’ As an old woman she is still grateful for her own exceptional book-knowledge.

‘ If your daughters are inclined to love reading,’ she writes, ‘ do not check their inclination by hindering them of the diverting part of it ; it is as necessary for the amusement of women as the reputation of men ; but teach them not to expect or desire any applause from it. Let their brothers shine, and let them content themselves with making their lives easier by it, which I experimentally know is more effectually done by study than any other way. Ignorance is as much the fountain of vice as idleness, and indeed generally produces it. People that do not read, or work for a livelihood, have many hours they know not how to employ ; especially women, who commonly fall into vapours, or something worse.’ This admits of no appeal.

She herself is never tedious, but she does not follow the counsel she gives women, to hide learning as they would lameness ; and more than once, it is plain that

she enjoys her superiority. To her dear Lady Bristol she quotes a Latin inscription from a mosque, and adds a delightfully sly warning, 'Your lord will interpret these lines. Don't fancy they are a love-letter to him.' Usually, however, she abides by her own prudent maxim that 'True knowledge consists in knowing things, not books.'

An 'arranged' marriage was altogether distasteful to so high-spirited a person. Her father forbade her marrying Edward Wortley, because the young man refused to entail his landed property on a son who might prove himself unworthy ; and the prohibition brought about the elopement of the clever and independent couple. The letters which passed between them at the time are eminently characteristic. Lady Mary possessed much polite learning, but we have not grasped her true character before we realize that the world from the beginning was her trade. She discusses money settlements with her future husband, repudiates romance, and plays on the weakness of her friends. From youth up she is malicious. It is at this period that she gives an account of the engagement of one Mr. Vanbrugh to a lady not young : ' . . . but you know Van's taste was always odd ; his inclination to ruins has given him a fancy for Mrs. Yarborough ; he sighs and ogles that it would do your heart good to see him ; and she is not a little pleased, in so small a proportion of men amongst such a number of women, a whole man should fall to her share.'

After the marriage came her journey to Turkey, whither Mr. Wortley was sent on an embassy. Her propensities for criticism are fostered by the things she sees on her travels, and she enjoys the comparison between manners at home and abroad in a less ingenuous way than *The Citizen of the World*. She is quite intrepid where most women

of her time at least would have had vapours at the thought of the danger and discomfort the voyage entailed. But away from the Town she is an exile. While she keeps her sister, the Countess of Mar, informed of the novelties she has to study, Lady Mary is always clamouring for news from London : ‘ You content yourself with telling me over and over that the town is very dull: it may possibly be dull to you, when every day does not present you with something new; but for me, that am in arrear at least two months’ news, all that seems very stale with you would be fresh and sweet here.’ It is a recrimination from the pen of one who talked with unaffected horror of a woman ‘ on the brink of Scotland for life ! ’

Her own descriptive powers are untiring. The letters at this period are filled with accounts of the Court of Vienna, of her visit to the wife of the Grand Vizier when they had reached Adrianople, and ecstatic pictures of the wife of the second officer in the empire : ‘ That surprising harmony of feature ! That charming result of the whole ! That exact proportion of body ! That lovely bloom of complexion unsullied by art ! The unutterable enchantment of her smile ! But her eyes ! . . . ’ And so on.

The chief part of her letters to Pope was written on this journey, and it is for her relations with him and the contrasts they present that Lady Mary has been most often noticed. Pope’s letters were fulsome with flattery of the wit and beauty of his fair correspondent. It was the time before their quarrel, and for a while he fooled Lady Mary to the top of her bent, but she was too cunning to be really deceived. She writes, ‘ I long much to tread upon English ground, that I may see you and Mr. Congreve, who render that ground classic ground ’; yet already before her departure she had ceased to let Pope correct her own literary

compositions, for fear (as was too probable) that he should appropriate all the praise and leave her all the blame. The poet had recently written an elegant set of verses upon two young country people struck by lightning : the sentiments the elegy displayed were doubtless called affecting and sublime by his circle at home, and Pope sent out the lines for Lady Mary's admiration. She retorted with a tale of ' Pastoral lovers vulgarly called haymakers ' of her own. It began with the felicitous couplet :

Here lies John Hughes and Sarah Drew.

Perhaps you'll say, What's that to you?

Pope did not forgive Lady Mary even in consideration of the two last lines :

Now they are happy in their doom,
For P. has wrote upon their tomb.

On her return, Lady Mary took a house at Twickenham itself, but the intimacy was carried on only for a short time. The actual reason of their quarrel is unknown. Conjecture says that Lady Mary, who had seen through the artificiality of Pope's phrases from the first, mocked at his advances and treated him without mercy. The lines on Sappho followed in 1735. He had addressed her by that name panegyrically in 1722, but his defence now was nevertheless very strong. If the lady took offence at the satire it was, he could say, because she felt the cap fitted. She wrote to Pope's friend Arbuthnot, ' I know he will allege in his excuse that he must write to eat ; and he has now grown sensible that nobody will buy his verses except their curiosity is piqued to it, to see what is said of their acquaintance ', and she joined forces with the injured Sporus to compose lampoons in which the poet was taunted with his ' wretched little carcass ', but she must have realized that Pope's weapons were far better pointed than her own. If we

may judge her on Walpole's testimony, she had very vulnerable parts. 'Her dress, her avarice, and her impudence must amaze any one that never heard her name'; and, thirty years after the appearance of the first *Imitation of Horace*, 'Her dress, like her language, is a galimatias of several countries, the ground-work rags and the embroidery nastiness.'

When away from England Lady Mary writes constantly for money to her husband, with whom she seems to have remained on a friendly if not an intimate footing. They are, however, small sums, and she does not appear avaricious. We cannot judge her dress, but the attribution of impudence by one whom she had called Horry Walpole and a good creature, we may well understand. If her learning was held in control, her irony was not: such a malicious being must make foes. In 1739 Lady Mary went to live abroad, and absence alone put a term to the feud with Pope.

When she came back to London from the Embassy, her wit was at its height. She writes of marriages: 'Where are people matched? I suppose we shall all come right in Heaven; as in a country dance, the hands are strangely given and taken while they are in motion, at last all meet their partners when the jig is done.' She writes of deaths, and comments on all the news of the Town with a refrain about its folly: 'My father is going to the Bath, Sir William Wyndham is dying of a fistula, Lady Darlington and Lady Mohun are packing up for the next world, and the rest of our acquaintance playing the fool in this *à l'ordinaire*.'

She was fifty when she retired to the continent, full of experience and worldly wisdom, yet with a heart as gay as ever. On her own telling we know how she tried all her life to turn its opportunities to her diversion.

Many years earlier she had become enthusiastic over inoculation against small-pox, and had brought its secrets to England from abroad. In Brescia she established another claim to renown, and all but earned immortality by butter-making. Being as domestic as she was intellectual, she pleased herself, teaching the science of the dairy to the ignorant inhabitants; and they would have put up a monument to her in their public square, but that she feared ridicule and begged them to desist. It is not the only instance of gratitude she inspired through her kindness to those whose social position rendered rivalry impossible.

Her life was now given up to her gardening, to her churning, to the books Lady Bute sent out, and to a correspondence devoted to her daughter and the growing family of grand-children. ‘You have been the passion of my life,’ she confesses to Lady Bute in pages full of tenderness, where she bestows upon her correspondent, not perhaps as profitably as might be, the stored wisdom of one grown old in the commerce of the world. The letter on the education of children is the shrewdest she ever wrote. ‘People commonly educate their children as they build their houses, according to some plan they think beautiful,’ she says, ‘without considering whether it is suited to the purposes for which they are designed. Almost all girls of quality are educated as if they were expected to be great ladies, which is often as little to be expected as an immoderate heat of the sun in the north of Scotland.’ And she adds a frank prudential warning: ‘Sincerity, friendship, piety, disinterestedness and generosity are all great virtues; but pursued without discretion become criminal.’ ‘Criminal’ is characteristic.

Her daughter is to moderate her maternal love in order to spare herself pain later. At the end of the letter she

exclaims : ‘ There is another mistake I forgot to mention, usual in mothers : if any of their daughters are beauties they take great pains to persuade them they are ugly, or at least that they think so, which the young woman never fails to believe springs from envy, and is perhaps not much in the wrong. I would, if possible, give them a just notion of their figure, and show them how far it is valuable ! Every advantage has its price, and may be either over or undervalued.’ Lady Bute, it seems, did not appreciate her mother’s views for the upbringing of children. In the Brescia letters there are frequent apologies for an old woman’s tattle. They do not understand one another : ‘ Daughter ! Daughter ! Don’t call names ; you are always abusing my pleasure, which is what no mortal will bear.’ We feel she is ill requited for the powers of sympathy that cannot be denied to the writer of the latest letters. She grows more and more tender towards youth and suffering. At the death of Wolfe, for instance, she says : ‘ I am of your opinion, compassion is only owing to his mother and intended bride, who I think the greatest sufferer. . . . Disappointments in youth are those that are felt with the greatest anguish, when we are all in expectation of happiness perhaps not to be found in this life.’

Not long before her death she wrote a phrase delicately suggestive of her own existence and the picturesque aspect of the Town of which she was the product : ‘ My health is so often disordered that I begin to be as weary of it as mending old lace ; when it is patched in one place it breaks in another.’ She died at the age of seventy-three.

Lady Mary claimed for herself a place amongst letter-writers not second to Madame de Sevigné. On the score of purity of style alone her pages hardly deserve such praise. Lady Mary’s pen is easy indeed, but it cannot always avoid

'longueurs', and when she takes short cuts in expression they are apt to be better in keeping with her own character than with grammar. But her letters are delightfully human documents, and style proper is hardly a requisite for this kind of composition. There can be no school of letter-writing, yet letters may usually be found to correspond with some forces in contemporary literature. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's letters correspond with the satirical poetry of the period, with Pope's reflection of society in the *Satires* and *The Rape of the Lock*. She had not the material to hand for forming a salon in her circle of acquaintance, and she was probably too ironic to have been a successful hostess ; but it is among the wits of the French salons that we shall find her peers.

V

YOUNG'S NIGHT THOUGHTS

EDWARD YOUNG was born in the year 1684—but the less said about his life the better. Poets should be heard, and not seen. Those who write their biographies, do so at their own risk: for a personal acquaintance with authors may diminish our appreciation of their offspring, by reminding us that it is of mortal birth after all.

Young narrates his own story—at least as much of it as we wish to hear:

Twice told the period spent on stubborn Troy
Court-favour, yet untaken, I besiege.

But Hector seems to have been invulnerable :

When in his courtiers' ears I pour my plaint,
They drink it in like nectar of the Gods,
And squeeze my hand and bid me come to-morrow.

In one line he sums up the whole story :

I've been so long remembered, I'm forgot.

This was one tragedy of his life; he had cried so long ‘O for the paths of solitude !

My hours my own,
My faults unknown,
My chief revenue be content’¹,

that it was thought that a bishop's revenue, which Young had long courted, would involve too much society for him.

But, of course, as every one knows, there was a real

¹ *Ocean, an Ode.*

tragedy to his life, and as this concerns his chief poem, it may be well to discuss it.

Who were Lorenzo, Philander, and Narcissa? Philander and Narcissa, so far as we can see, were Mrs. Temple, Young's stepdaughter, and Mr. Temple, with whom he was very friendly. They did not die

Ere thrice yon moon had filled his horn;
but poetry, and particularly elegy, does not keep strictly to facts. Lorenzo was no relation of Young; he is called a friend, but really in the poem he is such a mannikin, set up to be knocked down, that I do not believe he ever had any real existence. Young was not the man to call his court friends heretics, atheists, fools, even if they were.

And now for the poem itself. Its most striking characteristic is its metre. Johnson says of it: 'It is one of the few poems in which blank verse could not be with advantage changed for rime.' This is rather a high compliment, when we consider that *Paradise Lost* was not one of the few, or was admitted only on second thoughts. Yet certain it is that the metre of the *Night Thoughts* is one of the most striking productions of the eighteenth century; it has, with all its faults, a roll and swell such as had seldom been heard since the *Paradise Lost*. Take, for instance, the magnificent opening lines:

Tired Nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep!
She like the world her ready visit pays
Where fortune smiles; the wretched she forsakes
And lights on lids unsullied by a tear.
Night, sable goddess, from her ebon throne,
In rayless majesty now stretches forth
Her leaden sceptre o'er a slumbering world.
Silence how dead, and darkness how profound!
Nor eye, nor listening ear an object finds;
Creation sleeps. 'Tis as the general pulse

Of life stood still, and Nature made a pause,
 An awful pause prophetic of her end.
 And let that prophecy be soon fulfilled :
 Fate drop the curtain, I can lose no more.

Impertinent people have a habit of asking a poet, 'Where did you get that metre?' yet, after all, it is sometimes a pertinent question. But the verse of Thomson and Young was *got* from no single predecessor. It seems at first view an almost entirely original growth. True, some lines show an influence of Milton :

Urania, my celestial guest who deigns
 Nightly to visit me so mean ;

but I do not think it is to Milton we should look either for the virtues or the faults of Young's blank verse : nay, look again, and the virtues and faults themselves betray their parentage.

Amongst the virtues we find sonorousness, force, dramatic and pre-eminently epigrammatic force :

Pope, who couldst make immortals, art thou dead ?
 The famous passage beginning

Procrastination is the thief of time,
 is simply one beadstring of epigrams ; and the equally famous passage on Man is a perfect collection of antitheses, row after row of balancing letter-scales,

How poor—how rich,
 How abject—how august,
 How complicate, how wonderful is man.
 How passing wonder
 He who made him such,
 An heir of glory—a frail child of dust ;
 Helpless—immortal,
 Insect—infinite.
 A worm—a god. And so on.

But in this highly balanced style there are, as is only to be expected, very serious inequalities. In his search for neat comparisons and balanced maxims, Young does not much care whence he takes his material. I have noticed no fewer than three similes from the Bankruptcy Court, and two from the watch-maker :

The horologe machinery divine,
and

The rivet of eternity.

Not only is the verse very unequal, with magnificent lines sandwiched between passages straining for effect and finding it not, but also the diction is very unequal.

In fact, Young's *Night Thoughts* is the exact opposite of what Johnson calls it : it is *not* a 'Chinese plantation, a magnificence of vast extent and endless diversity', as he aptly misrepresents it. It is a huge 'terraqueous' marsh of melancholy, where groweth many a flower, and many a weed.

Most readers come to it full of adverse criticisms, as they come to a discounted lecturer, expecting, hoping to be bored, and to be able to pour the full force of their satire and sarcasm on him afterwards ; and most of them go away after reading Book I and half of Book II, convinced that Young is a much abused man, and his *Night Thoughts* a great poem.

So it is—undeniably great, but it is unreadably great. It is full of magnificent passages : if I chose to quote, I believe I could persuade any one who had no acquaintance with the work that it is absolutely magnificent, monumental, Miltonic. So it is ; but it is all the same. All the good passages are in the same strain ; one comes away from it feeling like M. Perrichon after his truffles, a little weary of excellence.

Not even its inequalities can give it diversity. It is all the same, purple patches and weak lines. The bad passages are only a robe of purple round a form of clay, while the good are the same robe, perhaps slightly less fantastic, round a living and powerful thought. But one can read on and on, and at the end know not a jot more than when one started, have remembered nothing, have only a vague inkling that all flesh is grass and that grass, though a hardy perennial, is doomed to wither. That is the great fault of Young, and of all eighteenth-century blank verse, the only reason (yet reason enough !) why it is so seldom read.

So much, then, for the vices and virtues of Young's metre. Whence came it? The same spirit which inspired the heroic couplet was, I think, responsible also for eighteenth-century blank verse. Only that studious care, that minute study, which wrote on Monday and corrected all the rest of the week, could produce it. Nay, more, it bears on its face the stamp of the heroic couplet. Note how each paragraph tends to close with a perfect heroic couplet, except that it does not rhyme:

Still melting there and with voluptuous pain
(O to forget thee) thrilling through my br—
no! heart.

Look at the close of any long paragraph, where the last two lines are meant to be particularly emphatic, and in nine cases out of ten, you will find a disguised heroic. Take, for instance, the fine passage quoted again below:

Ye sable clouds, ye darkest shades of night
Hide him, for ever hide him from my—
thought.

Once he actually does use a rimed couplet:

Who triumphs there
Bathing for ever in the font of bliss,
For ever basking in the deity,
Lorenzo who? Thy conscience shall reply.

Quite a good rhyme according to eighteenth-century rules ; and any number of eighteenth-century 'assonances' can be found at the ends of paragraphs :

bliss,	there,	storm,	fair,	scene,
rise,	shore,	charm,	show'r,	explain,

which show well enough that Pope tuned the Muse's harp.

The heroic couplet was the father of eighteenth-century blank verse ; but in blank verse there is no restriction of rhyme, and hence no inducement to compression. The old lady knits away at her work, but she has become so facile, and the threads run so smoothly, for there are no nasty double-knots and patterns to interrupt her, that the click, click, click, of her knitting-needles sends us to sleep.

But it is a very good pair of stockings. Eighteenth-century blank verse is difficult to surpass in rhythm, flow, smoothness, nicety of workmanship ; but imagination, variety,—these were not in the father, the heroic couplet, and neither are they therefore in the son.

The 'smooth levelled lawn of the heroic couplet'¹ is often monotonous enough, but in blank verse there are no regular marks of the mower dividing it into strips ; there are no terraces, and the poet is apt to roll down the hill. Young spoils his work again and again for want of a rhyme to check him ; as Johnson points out :—

When he lays hold of an illustration he pursues it beyond expectation ; sometimes happily, as in his parallel of quicksilver with pleasure which I have heard repeated

¹ Johnson's *Essay on Pope*.

with approbation by a lady of whose approbation he would have been justly proud, and which is very ingenious, very subtle and almost exact; but sometimes he is less lucky, as when in his *Night Thoughts*, it having dropped into his mind that the orbs floating in space might be called the cluster of creation, he thinks of a cluster of grapes and says they all hang on the great vine drinking the 'nectareous juice of immortal life'.

A great deal, too, has been said about Young's dramatic method. It is not the melodramatic grouping of Thomson: snow—lost traveller—wolves,

Cruel as death and hungry as the grave,
Thirsting for blood, bony and gaunt, and grim,—

but is rather the clerical dramaticism of the pulpit. Young treats Lorenzo like the hypothetical sinner of a village sermon—'The fool hath said in his heart: "There is no God." Ah, dear friends, you will hear people say —' 'Ah, yes, friends, but you will tell me —'

What an old tale is this! Lorenzo cries:
I grant the argument is old, but Truth
No years impair . . .

O be wise
Nor make a curse of Immortality! . . .
. . . Say knowest thou WHAT IT IS, or what THOU ART,
Knowest thou th' importance . . . &c.

Note the dramatic *pause* in the above quotation, a device of which Young is very fond, and one almost peculiar to the pulpit—the breathless silence during which the ladies drop their threepenny bits, and the gentlemen hurriedly finish reading the Table of Affinity.

OH FOR A VOICE . . . ! of what? of whom? what voice?

But Mr. Goldwin Smith sets down many passages as 'mere rhetoric' which, in my opinion, are not so. Young is

sometimes purely rhetorical, but he is far more frequently purely poetical, even though the poetry be of a strange kind. It is only in the weaker passages (where the dramatic pauses grow most luxuriantly) that he is rhetorical, owing to a desire to keep up the stress where no stress is.

This is the great fault of eighteenth-century poets and dramatists: they do not vary excellence. Their tragedies are an unbroken series of nerve-shredding situations, leading to the final catastrophe, with no pause, no rest, not a moment's relief, one straight cross-country run to the death. They would make good melodramas; Moore's *Gamester* would be an admirable play, and acquit itself well in a revival, if only we were given a moment's rest now and then, and not suffocated like Petronius in a shower of rose-leaves: if there were only a comic scene, or even a dull scene, during which we might chew a meditative chocolate, or frame Lucy and Charlotte in the circle of our opera-glasses. But there is not: and so Beverley sleeps on to doomsday, with no hope of revival, between the pages of *Modern British Drama*, London, 1811.

And we find just the same fault in their poetry. Pope from beginning to end is one ceaseless sparkle of epigram, antithesis, bon-mot. I positively long for a bad line, and search in vain amongst the 'alternatives' for something that does not scan well, or does not contain more than twice as much matter as an ordinary prose collection of ten odd syllables. What eighteenth-century ladies did with their patches, eighteenth-century men never learnt to do in their poetry—to enhance perfection by a flaw. Did not the sculptor of the Venus of Milo himself knock off those mysterious arms? Very likely. Very likely he never put them on.

Much of the monotony of the *Night Thoughts* is due to this failure to vary the stress : but I should suspect that it is due far more to the difficulty of the subject. Milton's task in *Paradise Regained* was hard enough, where dialogue and description found place ; but to write a purely didactic monologue on so well-canvassed a subject as immortality, and to make it interesting, is absolutely impossible, doubly impossible to a man of Young's views. Had Young been an atheist himself, or a heretic, or a pantheist, or even a Methodist, it might have been easier : but when the poet is the quintessence of orthodox churchmanship, be he Montgomery, or be he Milton, he cannot produce a really readable poem on that subject. He cannot invent new theosophic theories, pantheistic paradoxes, describe new-fangled Nirvanas, or mock at our antiquated heaven : he can only repeat the old old story which gains nothing by being diluted in iambic deasyllabics. As Johnson says in his essays on Waller and Fenton :

The ideas of Christian theology are too simple for eloquence, too sacred for fiction, too sublime for ornament ; to recommend them by tropes and figures is to magnify the sidereal hemisphere by a concave mirror.

'Sublime and solemn prose gains little by a change to blank verse'—as Young himself in his paraphrase of Job too truly shows : Job's tears in heroic couplets were not a success.

Young had all the disadvantages of Milton in *Paradise Regained*, the danger that 'the imagery which was designed to illustrate history (or theology) might stand in its light.'¹ Milton overcame the difficulty by cutting down his imagery, by writing a poem almost unparalleled in literature for the scarcity of its ornament ; Young ('magnis componere

¹ Mark Pattison, English Men of Letters Series.

parva') in his whole plan and method runs contrary to this. Where he does speak on theology, he clogs it with embellishment, till it looks like a parody of Scripture ; but usually he is so afraid of repeating old texts, of not being original, so conscious of the absence in himself of Dryden's wonderful power of quick argument in verse, that, when he comes in Book VI to argue really about immortality at last, he inserts a couple of prefaces which contain all the relevant argument, and the books themselves are mainly occupied with wanderings off into quite secondary matters.

Dryden argued on a sectarian question, Pope boldly promulgated a New Theology, and both have succeeded. But Young treated the bases of Christianity where originality was inadmissible—and yet after all, he does not compare so unfavourably with Pope. He has quite as many inconsistencies and fallacies, but he has a far deeper passion, a far greater dignity and sincerity. Pope treats a lighter theme, it is true :

Hope springs eternal in the human breast,
but still the lightness of his theme does not necessarily exclude him from a more genuine and 'out of the heart' method of treatment.

Compare Pope and Young on 'Knowledge of God.'

Pope :—

Go, wondrous creature, mount where science guides ;
Go, measure earth, weigh air and state the tides :
Instruct the planets in what orb to run,
Correct old time and regulate the sun :
Go, soar with Plato to the empyreal sphere,
To the first good, first perfect, and first fair ;
Or tread the mazy round his followers trod,
And quitting sense, call imitating God ;

As eastern priests in giddy circles run,
And turn their heads to imitate the sun.
Go teach Eternal Wisdom how to rule,
Then drop into thyself and be a fool !

And Young :—

Know thy Creator ! Climb his blest abode,
By painful speculation pierce the veil,
Dive in his nature, read his attributes,
And gaze in admiration—on the foe,
Obtruding life, withholding happiness,
From the full mirrors that surround his throne,
Nor letting fall one drop of joy on man ;
Man gasping for one drop, that he might cease
To curse his birth, nor envy reptiles more !
Ye sable clouds, ye darkest shades of night
Hide him, for ever hide him from my thought.

And yet Pope is the greater success in the end : he had, to a far greater extent, that Drydenian power of argument, though he too is apt to stray. He has a wide field, not a trodden, walled path ; he can vary his arguments, interest us in what is coming next, what he is leading us to. In Young we always know what is coming, and we always think of the original ; until he wanders back to his tombstones again. The only person for whom the *Night Thoughts* could have any originality or interest, from the philosophical point of view, was Lorenzo.

Possibly Young felt this, and knowing his Lorenzo to be a fiction, and that the real Lorenzos would not read his book, did not trouble to put in more actual theological argument than he was compelled to. For certain it is that he has a marvellous knack of digressing. Let him head his book Christian Hope, yet in a few lines he is back to the old theme :

All flesh is grass.
All, all on earth is shadow.

His morbid yet rather impressive gloom was proverbial. It is said that when he announced the intention of writing a new poem, Spence sent him a skull with a candle in it—which he used. Even Byron remarks on it :—

'Where is the world !' cries Young at eighty ; 'where
The world in which a man was born ? Alas,
Where is the world of eight years past ? 'Twas there,
I look for it, 'tis gone, a globe of glass.'

But Young's is not the melancholy of a man bereaved, or of an old man feeling the slow numbing of his faculties, and cursing the world in which he wasted them while they were his. It is an almost sexton-like revelry in the gloom of the grave-yard—

The vale funereal, the sad cypress gloom,
The land of apparitions, empty shades.

The remarkable thing is that this weird moonlight melancholy was not peculiar to Young. It runs through all the minor poets of the period. Parnell is the first to show it, and it goes on from him almost uninterrupted till long after the close of the eighteenth century.

See it in Parnell :

All pale and wan and wrapped in shrouds,
They rise in visionary clouds ;
And all with sober accents cry,
"Think, mortal, what it is to die."

and Warton :

O lead me, Queen sublime, to solemn gloom,
To ruined seats, to twilight cells and bowers.

So also Blair :

What is this World ?

What but a spacious burial-field unwalled
Strewed with death's spoils, the spoils of animals,
Savage, and tame, and full of dead men's bones.

And Dyer :

There is a pleasing mood of melancholy,
Which wings the soul and points it to the skies.

These two lines are the key-note of late eighteenth-century poetry.

Even the greater poets feel the same influence ; Thomson, after a gay description of a sociable winter's evening, cannot refrain from the pleasing reflection :

Ah, little think they as they dance along,
How many feel this very moment Death.

And the novelists every year show an increasing love of tombs, phantoms, skeletons, and melancholy maidens.

'Only fools, children, and savages are happy', says Miss Cherry Wilkinson in *The Heroine*, a protest against the sensational and sentimental school. And well deserved was the protest ; in *The Man of Feeling*, written thirty years after the *Night Thoughts*, there are forty-seven floods of tears in a hundred and ninety pages—sobs, choking, &c., not included.

Of course, all the literature of England is tinged with a solemnity and sadness ; but at this period it seems to reach a climax, a perfect epidemic of funereal gloom. Great poets feel sorrow and express it without gloating over it like these late eighteenth-century writers.

Amongst village people of England, who in their fashions, spirit, and habits of life, as any student of rural life will know, are always a generation or so behind the upper classes of the towns, one sees just the same thing, a relic of the past, like the pattens and lustres. If there is a funeral—if there only is !—it is an event; every one is there in his best Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes, and they all condole with each other :—'It is very sad, very grievous, taken away so soon'—and so on. They all attend, next Sunday, at

church to hear a funeral oration pronounced on the departed one, and stifled sobs punctuate the periods.

I do not wish to be heartless and scoff at the simple annals of the poor; but any one who has ever wandered into the heart of Hampshire or spent a few days at the top of the Cotswolds will see unmistakably the old spirit there, which prompts this gloating over grief.

Only one real parallel is to be found to it in literature, the close of the old English poetry. *The Seafarer*, *Widsith*, and *The Ruin*, read beside Young and poets of his nature and period, show a marked resemblance in spirit.

Compare the *Wanderer* (freely translated):

When I think on the chieftains of war,
How they rose up and went from the hall;
When I think on companions of yore,—
Gone from me,—suddenly—all!

So fades the earth like a flower,
So do its petals die;
Man is not wise in an hour,
Not till life's winter is nigh.

and Young :

We gaze around,
We read men's monuments, we sigh! And while
We sigh, we sink, and are what we deplored;
Lamenting or lamented all our lot.

again :

O well he remembered the hall men, the treasure
bestowed in the hall,
The feast that his gold-giver gave him, the joy at
its height, at its fall.

Thought

Strays wretched o'er the pleasing past,
In quest of wretchedness perversely strays,
And finds all desolate now.

Compare the Wanderer's description of a ruined hall with Dyer :

On our mid-earth many a where the wind-swept
walls arise,
And the ruined dwellings and void, and the rime
that on them lies.

Rent palaces, crushed columns, rifled moles,
Fanes rolled on fanes and tombs on buried tombs.¹

Both seem to delight in scenes of ruin and desolation, and both delight in the same melancholy way, not as artists, but as mourners, melancholic ghosts, like those in their poems, which wander sadly through the ruined castle, dragging behind them a rattling chain.

They do not cry with Wordsworth :

Forgive, illustrious country, the deep sighs
Heaved less for thy bright plains and hills bestrewn,
With monuments decayed and overthrown . . .
Than for like scenes in moral vision shown . . .
Virtues laid low and mouldering energies.
Yet why prolong this mournful strain, Fallen Power ?
Thy fortunes twice exalted might provoke
Verse to glad notes prophetic of the hour.
When thou uprisen shalt break the double yoke.²

Rather theirs was the voice of Ossian :

Why dost thou build these halls, son of the winged days ?
To-morrow the wind will moan in thy empty courts.
All, all on earth is shadow !

It was a revelry in ruins, as ruins, not as signs of grandeur past, rich with the promise of grandeur yet to come.

Is not this in both cases the swan song of a dying age

¹ Dyer, *Ruins of Rome*.

Sonnet, 'From the Alban Hills, looking towards Rome.'

of poetry; a song of bitter repentance for past unbelief dispelled too late; a sudden wonderful recognition, after years of scepticism, of a strange twilight world about them, which previously they knew not of, and in which now they revel wildly for a moment, before they go hence and be no more seen?

Was it not the proper and natural reaction of the eighteenth century against itself? The previous hard-headed, materialistic, everyday-life poetry inevitably produced as its complement this strange, fantastic, shadow poetry. This was the natural reflux of the tide,—a reflux broken and diverted by the *Lyrical Ballads*, which started a new era, disconnected with the old.

Byron alone in verse carries on the latter traditions of the Augustan age, as did Scott in prose, both infusing somewhat of the new spirit.

Compare Byron with the last three quotations:

I stood within the Coliseum's wall,¹
Midst the chief relics of almighty Rome . . .

Where the Caesars dwelt,
And dwell the tuneless birds of night amidst,
A grove which springs through levelled battlements,
And twines its roots with the imperial hearths . . &c.

Note how the Nature-poetry of Wordsworth seems to mingle with the eighteenth century 'melancholy prospect', and note in the closing lines the new, more optimistic spirit:—

And thou didst shine, thou rolling moon, upon
All this, and cast a wide and tender light,
Which soften'd down the hoar austerity
Of rugged desolation, and filled up
As 'twere anew the gaps of centuries.

¹ *Manfred*, Act III, Sc. iv (The Forum).

Leaving that beautiful which still was so,
And making that which was not, till the place
Became religion and the heart ran o'er
With silent worship of the great of old!—
The dead, but sceptred sovereigns who still rule
Our spirits from their urns.

How different from the moral of Dyer:

Vain end of human strength and human skill.

This was not the motto of the new school of poetry.

'The new'. But why do we cry always for the new wine: there is a charm in Young found in none of the more optimistic usurpers of his throne. Fond as we are of summer, we yet like a rainy day sometimes: neither Wordsworth's eternal Spring nor De Quincey's everlasting teapot can always content us. 'There is a pleasing mood of melancholy'; we all have it at times, and if then we read a book of the *Night Thoughts*, we recognize its solemn charm. It is a vast, perfect embodiment of that sweet sadness which we feel as we gaze on a ruined castle, Time's derelict; or on a grass-grown road, and wonder who passed along it last; or on an old book, annotated in quaint yellow ink, by—we know not whom—Lorenzo, perhaps.

VI

HORACE WALPOLE'S VIEWS ON LITERATURE

'THE faults of Horace Walpole's head and heart are indeed sufficiently glaring. His writings, it is true, rank as high among the delicacies of intellectual epicures as the Strasburg pies described in the *Almanach des Gourmands*: but as the *pâté de foie gras* owes its excellence to the diseases of the wretched animal which furnishes it, and would be good for nothing if it were not made of livers preternaturally swollen, so none but an unhealthy and disorganized mind could have produced such literary luxuries as the works of Walpole.'

Macaulay on Boswell, Macaulay on Horace Walpole! Is there anything more exquisitely diverting in the annals of criticism? Incompetence tricked out in all the parade of authority, political animus masquerading as judicial serenity; an age that has ceased to admire the rhetoric will pay but scant honour to the caprice that in Macaulay's literary arsenal does service for good sense. To vindicate the character of Horace Walpole against a charge so trumpery and so inane, the best if not the briefest method is to make some selection from those casual but brilliant comments with which the fifteen volumes of the correspondence literally abound.

A biography of Horace Walpole is not perhaps necessary, but it is worth while to notice that his education at Eton implied a sound knowledge of the classics, a knowledge which he increased rather than diminished as he grew older. Quotations from Horace, Virgil, Lucretius, Ovid, Juvenal, Martial, Statius are to be found side by side with those from

authors covering the whole range of English and French literature. Gray, a poet, a scholar, and a wit, was among his earliest friends. The list of his correspondents, to cite only a few, includes Voltaire, Gibbon, Madame du Deffand, Bishop Percy, George Colman, Edmund Malone, and his particular friends Sir Horace Mann, Mason, West, the Rev. William Cole, George Montagu, General Conway, and Hannah More. That he should have been fast friends for many years with so many people of such various character and attainments may be taken as a proof that he possessed sterling qualities of heart as well as of head, that he was not so shallow and capricious as Macaulay would have us believe. That his mind was trivial and ill-balanced is an easy charge to fling, but it is worth noticing that a letter-writer who should deal with nothing but events of the first importance, would denude himself of correspondents, and probably of friends. An event has not the same importance in the eyes of an individual that it has in the destinies of nations or the chronicles of history. An attack of gout perturbed the average Englishman a great deal more than the French Revolution, and if he were writing a letter it is not difficult to guess which would be uppermost in his mind. Trivialities are indeed the soul of letter-writing, and that Walpole's letters should be alive after the lapse of a century is not a reflection on his intelligence or his sense of proportion, but a tribute to his admirable talent.

In dealing with Walpole's criticisms of literature it must be remembered that many of these are first impressions, written while he was still reading the book he discussed, written too with the intention of amusing his friends. This last is important, for in his ambition to be entertaining he would be prone to sacrifice caution to the certainty of a jest. He must not be taken *au pied de la lettre*. He

must often have said more than he meant, often have meant more than he cared to say. Compliments were expected from the authors who sent him books ; abuse of persons who had offended them was expected by his friends. Walpole was besides, as Leslie Stephen has pointed out, a being quite unusually sensitive in so robust an age. He was out of sympathy with much that was characteristic of his time, and this alone would account for his depreciatory attitude towards the mass of contemporary literature.

There was little to praise : there was much to condemn, and Walpole's standard was inevitably fixed by the elegant and polite society in which he had his being. Within these limits it is greatly to his credit that he took a more just and a more comprehensive view of the fine arts than any of his social equals ; for though it is only with a single aspect of his genius that we have to deal, he was in advance of his age in his appreciation of architecture, painting, and archaeology. With all his parade of negligence, his constitutional aversion to any suspicion of professionalism, his persistent denial of any capacity for continued study, he was as well-informed as he was versatile, and his memory was an able lieutenant to his wit. This I hope my quotations will illustrate. The following is irrelevant to the subject, but has a certain local propriety :

I have been at Oxford : how could you possibly leave it ? After seeing that charming place, I can hardly ask you to come to Cambridge. Magdalen walks pleases me most ; I felt a pensive joy in 'em, occasioned by thinking how two Lytteltons had been drowned in the adjoining stream.

Writing to West, he mingles compliment and criticism of his tragedy with consummate tact :

Those who know you not so well as I do, would not wait with so much patience for the entry of Pausanias.

A little later he adds :

For encouragement to it 'tis an age most unpoetical !
'Tis even a test of wit to dislike poetry, though Pope has half a dozen, or a dozen old friends that he has preserved from the haste of last century.

Walpole was a judicious admirer of Pope. They had not a little in common, and though Pope had been a strenuous adversary of Sir Robert, Horace Walpole forgave him for his genius, and is never tired of quoting him, generally with a particular point and application.

In 1745 he writes :

Sir Thomas Hanmer has at last published his *Shakespeare* : he has made several alterations, but they will be the less talked of as he has not marked in the margin where or why he has made any change. One most curiously absurd alteration. It is said of Cassio,

'A Florentine, one almost damned in a fair wife.'

Sir Thomas has altered it, how do you think ? No, I should be sorry if you could think,

'almost damned in a fair phiz.'

What a tragic word, and what sense !

In the same year he writes :

The town flocks to a new play of Thomson's called *Tancred and Sigismunda*. It is very dull ; I have read it. I cannot bear modern poetry. These refiners of the purity of the stage, and of the incorrectness of English verse, are most wofully insipid. I had rather have written the most absurd lines in Lee than *Leonidas* or *The Seasons*, as I had rather be put in the round-house for a wrong-headed quarrel than sup quietly at eight o'clock with my grandmother.

Macaulay falls upon this harmless little joke, and with his usual happy knack distorts it into a critical aberration of the gravest significance. With a curious infelicity he gives

it as an instance of writers of rank and fashion spoken of as if they were entitled to the same precedence in literature as in the drawing-room. Lee was the son of a poor clergyman, who after writing several impassioned but bombastic dramas became incurably insane. Thomson was born of good family and in easy circumstances, and enjoyed during a long and untroubled life the society of distinguished friends. So much for Macaulay's comment. Walpole concludes his letter :

There is another of these tame geniuses, a Mr. Akenside, who writes odes.

In the following year he complains once more of the tendencies of the time :

Now, if one has a mind to be read, one must write metaphysical poems in blank verse, which though I own to be still easier, have not half the imagination of romances, and are dull without any agreeable absurdity.

In a letter of 1749 to George Montagu there occurs the well-known and graphic description of Fielding's hospitality :

Rigby and Peter Bathurst carried a servant of the latter, who had attempted to shoot him, before Fielding, who to all his other vocations has by the grace of Mr. Lyttelton added that of Middlesex justice. He sent them word he was at supper and they must come next morning. They did not understand that freedom and ran up, where they found him banqueting with a blind man, a woman, and three Irishmen, on some cold mutton and a bone of ham, both in one dish, and the dirtiest cloth. He never stirred nor asked them to sit.

He adds :

Millar the bookseller has done very generously by him : finding *Tom Jones*, for which he had given him six hundred

pounds, sell so greatly, he has since given him another hundred.

In connexion with this may be quoted a passage from a letter to Mr. Pinkerton over forty years later :

A style may be excellent without grace—for instance, Swift's. Eloquence may bestow a lasting style and one of more dignity, but eloquence may want that ease, that genteel air, that flows from or constitutes grace. Addison was master of that grace in his pieces of humour : Fielding had as much humour perhaps as Addison, but having no idea of grace is perpetually disgusting. .

In 1750 Walpole writes of Montesquieu's *Esprit des Lois* :

I think it is the best book that ever was written—at least I never learnt so much from all I ever read. There is as much wit as useful knowledge : Hainault is far inferior.

One of the points Macaulay pretends to make against Walpole as a critic concerns his allusions to *The World* as being by 'our first writers', and Macaulay naïvely suggests : 'Our readers will probably guess that Hume, Fielding, Smollett, Richardson, Collins, Akenside, Young, and so on, and so forth, were in the list.'

It is to be hoped his readers had sufficient intelligence to guess nothing of the kind. The phrase 'our first writers' is a mere *façon de parler*. *The World* was instituted to provide dainty and more or less ephemeral entertainment for a small and cultivated society. Its contributors were men like Lord Chesterfield, Lord Bath, Sir Charles Hanbury Williams, Coventry, and Cambridge. They were society personages and men of wit, with one exception not great writers in their own or any one else's estimation. Walpole is interested in it at its inception, and praises it from *esprit de corps*: but he is quite capable of depreciating it as well.

Lord Bath [he writes] has contributed a paper, but seems to have entirely lost all his wit and genius.

And this, again, to Sir Horace Mann :

There are several of our first writers, but in general you will not find that the paper answers the idea you have entertained of it.

And this :

There have been two *Worlds* by my Lord Chesterfield, lately, very pretty, and the rest very indifferent.

This letter to Bentley is interesting and amusing :

The Marquis de Saint Simon, whom I mentioned to you, at a very first visit proposed to me to look over a translation he had made of the *Tale of a Tub*. You shall judge of my scholar's competence. He translates 'L'Estrange, Dryden and others' as 'l'étrange Dryden'. Then in the description of the tailor as an idol, and his goose as the symbol, he says in a note that the goose means the dove, and is a concealed satire on the Holy Ghost. It puts me in mind of the Dane who, talking of orders to a Frenchman, said 'Notre Saint Esprit est un Eléphant.'

Walpole had a deep-rooted horror of heroic poetry. This is a far more serious blot on his literary character than the trifles exaggerated by Macaulay. He includes in a sweeping condemnation Homer, Virgil, Dante, and Milton. He allows their greatness, but he deplores the vehicle of expression, while for minor attempts no words will express his contempt and loathing. This trait bears out the view he encouraged of himself as a man incapable of real application and an elegant trifler. Probably he exaggerates the affection to amuse and surprise his correspondent. Of Voltaire he writes with some reason :

I have read the *Pucelle*, and am by no means popular, for I do not like it; it is as tiresome as if it were really an

heroic poem. So absurd, perplexed a story is intolerable, the humour often missed, and even the parts that give most offence I think very harmless.

Of letters he was a far better judge than of epic poetry : he is in his own element, and speaks with the confidence of authority.

If you have not got the new letters and memoirs of Madame de Maintenon, I beg I may recommend them for your summer reading. As far as I have got, which is but into the fifth volume, I think you will find them very curious and some very entertaining. The fourth volume has persuaded me of the sincerity of her devotion, and two or three letters at the beginning of my present tome made me even a little jealous for my adored Madame de Sévigné. I am quite glad to find they do not continue equally agreeable.

When a passage in his *Royal and Noble Authors* was sharply taken up, he writes to David Hume :

I perceive that the freedom I have taken with Sir Philip Sidney is what gives most offence, yet I think, if my words are duly weighed, it will be found that they are too strong rather than my argument weak, when we at this distance of time inquire what prodigious merits excited such admiration. What admiration ? Why, that all the learned of Europe praised him, all the poets of England lamented his death, the Republic of Poland thought of him for their King. Allowing as much sense for Sir Philip as his warmest admirers can demand, surely this country has produced many men of far greater abilities, who have by no means met with a proportionate share of applause—take Lord Bacon alone, who I believe of all our writers except Newton is most known to foreigners, and to whom Sir Philip was a puny child in genius.

This passage is not one which lays claim to great originality, but it is of interest coming from Walpole, whom, if

one believed his critics, one might expect to find exalting Sidney at the expense of Bacon and Newton.

To say the truth, I attribute the great admiration of Sir Philip Sidney to his having so much merit and learning for his rank.

'Rarus enim ferme sensus communis in illa
Fortuna'.

That 'for his rank' is surely a very significant qualification. It throws a light on Walpole's real attitude to the clever but shallow amateurs of society. He often praised them unduly, and with reason, for they were many of them his friends, and to do otherwise would have been bad policy and worse manners. A touch like this gives a clue to his honest opinion. Walpole was a sound judge of history, and his acquaintance with the chronicles of both England and France was unusually extensive. This is his comment on Clarendon :

I don't wonder, sir, that you prefer Lord Clarendon to Polybius, nor can two authors well be more unlike. The latter wrote a general history in a most obscure and almost unintelligible style, the former a portion of private history in the noblest style in the world. Whoever made the comparison, I will do them the justice to say that they understood bad Greek better than their own language in its elevation.

Of Robertson he writes :

Indeed, there is but one opinion about Mr. Robertson's *History*. I don't remember any other work that ever met universal approbation since the Romans and Greeks, who have now an exclusive charter for being the best writers in every kind; he is the historian that pleases me best.

Later he speaks with more enthusiasm of Gibbon, whose history was not yet published.

Sterne is not an author one would expect to suit his fastidious taste, nor does he :

A kind of novel called the *Life and Adventures of Tristram Shandy* has appeared, the great humour of which consists in the narration always going backwards. I can conceive a man saying that it would be droll to write a book in that manner, but have no notion of his persevering in executing it.

Turning to Voltaire :

The first volume of *Peter the Great* is arrived ; I weep over it. It is as languid as the campaign. He boasts of the materials communicated to him by the Czarina's orders, but alas ! he need not be proud of them. They only serve to show how much worse he writes history with material than without.

I need not quote Walpole's comments on the appearance of *Ossian*. He expresses very natural doubts as to the authenticity of the poems, and further admits to being wearied by them. His opinion is for once endorsed by Dr. Johnson. This conclusion to a letter is quaint and pleasing :

Strawberry is growing sumptuous in its latter day : it will scarce be any longer like the fruit of its name, or the modesty of its ancient demeanour, both of which seem to have been in Spenser's prophetic eye when he sung of 'the blushing strawberries'

Which lurk close-shrouded from high-looking eyes,
Showing that sweetness low and hidden lies.'

Spenser was imitated but not much quoted in the eighteenth century.

That Walpole had a genuine appreciation of Milton appears from several passages in the letters. In his letter to Christopher Wren he says :

The story of your grandfather being carried every year to Saint Paul's came not from Vertue, but from my having heard it often. It appeared very natural: would any man living have wondered if Milton had had his *Paradise Lost* read over to him every year?

He continues dissatisfied with existing literature:

I am awfully in want of reading, and sick to death of all our political stuff. I am reduced to Guicciardini, and, though the evenings are so long, I cannot get through one of his periods between dinner and supper.

A little later he explains his dislike of Richardson, for which he has been frequently rebuked. He is discussing some French letters, and observes:

They are imitated from an English standard, and in my opinion a most woful one: I mean the works of Richardson, who wrote those deplorably tedious lamentations, *Clarissa* and *Sir Charles Grandison*, which are pictures of high life as conceived by a bookseller, and romances as they would be printed by a Methodist preacher.

The causes of his aversion are not far to seek. Walpole read romances for the story; Dr. Johnson's comment on the results of pursuing that method with Richardson is too well known to repeat. The prevailing merit of *The Castle of Otranto* is its straightforward and absorbing narrative. Walpole had a keener eye for defects in the portrayal of the society of his time than we can lay claim to at this date. His preferences can be justified. He writes to Dr. Percy:

I have received from Mr. Dodsley the flattering and very agreeable present of the *Reliques of Ancient Poetry*, and though I have not had time yet to read the whole carefully, the transient perusal has given me so much pleasure that I am impatient to make you my acknowledgements.

He then goes into particulars about Lord Vaux and Lord Rochford, and encloses an old ballad transcribed from memory. Perhaps it is fanciful to connect Walpole and Scott by this link of a common enthusiasm. Both are antiquaries, and Scott has testified to the pleasure he found in Walpole as a romancer. This next is interesting, partly for its intrinsic truth, partly because it anticipates a dictum of Charles Lamb, many years later :

I never could conceive the marvellous merit of repeating the work of others in one's own language with propriety, however well delivered. Shakespeare is not more admired for writing his plays than Garrick for acting them.

In 1766 he writes to Lady Hervey of Swift :

His Journal sent to Stella during the last four years of the queen is a fund of entertainment. You will see his insolence in full colours, and at the same time how daily vain he is of being noticed by the ministers he affected to treat arrogantly. His panic at the Mohocks is comical, but what strikes one is bringing before one's eyes the incidents of a curious period.

There is a deal of sound criticism in a letter written to President Hénault :

On oublie de bonne heure les poètes qui ne parlent qu'aux passions naissantes. Votre Despréaux plaira toujours, parce qu'on est plus longtemps sur le retour que l'on est jeune. Mais c'est La Fontaine qui charme tous les âges, il a l'air d'écrire pour les enfants, et plus on avance en âge, plus on lui découvre de beautés.

Walpole's opinion of Boswell is that of most contemporaries, when the *Life* had not yet been written :

Pray read the account of Corsica. What relates to Paoli will amuse you much. The author, Boswell, is a strange being, and like Cambridge, has a rage of knowing anybody that ever was talked of. He forced himself

upon me in Paris, in spite of my doors. He then took an antipathy to me on Rousseau's account, abused me in the newspapers and exhorted Rousseau to do so too, but he came to see me no more. I forgave all the rest. However, his book will, I am sure, entertain you.

He prefers the *Sentimental Journey* to *Tristram Shandy*:

Sterne has published two little volumes. They are very pleasing, though too much dilated, and infinitely preferable to his tiresome *Tristram Shandy*. In these there is a great good-nature and strokes of delicacy.

There are a great many references to Gray. Walpole did not much encourage his friend's excursions into Norse mythology:

Gray has added to his poems three ancient odes from Norway and Wales. The subjects of the two first are grand and picturesque, but they are not interesting, and do not, like his other poems, touch any passion. Who can care through what horrors a Runic savage arrived at all the joys and glories they could conceive, the supreme felicity of boozing ale out of the skull of an enemy in Odin's hall?

On the appearance of two new epistles of Voltaire he writes:

I own I think that to Boileau one of the best things he ever wrote.

He quotes several lines, including this, which is now hackneyed:

Si Dieu n'existant pas, il faudrait l'inventer.

The two last [he proceeds] are inimitably bold and sublime; but his low jealousy against Boileau, whose ghost he is always nipping and pinching, when he can, with his own almost ghostly fingers, is almost unworthy of a man who does not want such little arts to secure fame.

Of Goldsmith his opinion is not flattering :

What play makes you laugh very much, and yet is a very wretched comedy : Dr. Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*. Stoops indeed !—so she does, that is, the Muse. She is draggled up to the knees, and has trudged, I believe, from Southwark fair. The whole view of the piece is low humour, and no humour is in it. All the merit is in the situations, which are comic : the heroine has no more modesty than Lady Bridget, and the author's wit is as much manqué as the lady's.

His interest in old ballads was sustained :

At present I am immersed in Warton's *History of Poetry*, and can listen to no news that don't begin thus—

‘ Herkeneth now both old and young
For Marie’s love, that swete thing,
How a werre began
Betwixen a god Christen King
And a hethen, heyhe Lordyng
Of Damas, the Soudan.’

Speaking of Lord Chesterfield, and having noticed ‘ he was sensible what a cub he had to work on, and whom two quartos of lickings could not mould, for cub he remained to his death ’, he then says :

The more curious part of all is that one perceives by what infinite assiduity and attention his Lordship’s own great character was raised and supported, yet in all that great character what was there worth remembering but his bon mots ? In short, the diamond owed more to being brillianted and polished than to any intrinsic worth or solidity.

The letter Walpole writes to Gibbon on the appearance of the first volumes of the *Decline and Fall* is full of judicious praise. He compliments him on his modesty, the absence of dictatorial arrogance, and, after paying this tribute to his character, concludes : ‘ You have unexpect-

edly given the world a classic history. The fame it must acquire will tend every day to acquit this panegyric of flattery.'

He exhorts him to proceed, and adds as the best proof of friendship, 'I am too weak to say more, though I could talk for hours on your history.'

Then he writes to Mason :

The style is as smooth as a Flemish picture, the muscles are concealed, and only for natural uses, not exaggerated like Michael Angelo's to show the painter's skill in anatomy, nor composed of the limbs of clowns of different nations like Dr. Johnson's heterogeneous monsters.

Walpole is a good critic of French literature, and knew, none better, the limits of that language :

The French have never had a Homer or a Pindar, nor probably will have, since Voltaire could make nothing more like an epic than the *Henriade*, and Boileau and Rousseau have succeeded so little in their odes that the French still think that ballad-wright Quénault their best lyric poet. Voltaire has lately written a letter against Shakespeare, and it is as downright Billingsgate as an apple-woman would utter if you overturned her wheelbarrow. Poor old wretch, how envy disgraces the highest talents. How Gray adored Shakespeare. Dr. Goldsmith told me he envied Shakespeare, but Goldsmith was an idiot with once or twice a fit of parts. It hurts me when a real genius like Voltaire can feel more spite than admiration, though I am persuaded that his rancour is grounded on his conscious inferiority. I wish you could lash this old scorpion a little, and teach him awe of English poets.

Politics are his perpetual complaint :

I know all that can be told me of the periods I delight in [he writes to Lady Ossory]. I can scarce read Grammont and Madame de Sévigné, because I know them by heart. Do I care for hearing how many ways Mr. Burke

can make a mosaic pavement, or an inlaid cabinet? Can I be diverted with Mr. Cumberland's comedies or Garrick's nonsensical epilogues? No truly, I am almost as sick of our literature as of our polities and politicians.

This, on Johnson, is quite true of the *Tour to the Western Isles*:

What a heap of words to express very little, and though it is the least cumbrous of any style he ever used, how far from easy and natural!

A little later we find him wading through what he describes as 'Mr. Tyrwhitt's most tedious notes to the *Canterbury Tales*.' This passage on Gray shows some discernment:

I find more people like the grave letters than those of humour, and some think the letters a little affected, which is as wrong a judgement as they could make, for Gray never wrote anything easily but things of humour. Humour was his natural and original turn—and though from his childhood he was grave and reserved, his genius led him to see things ludicrously and satirically, and though his health and dissatisfaction gave him low spirits, his melancholy tone was much more affected than his pleasantry in writing.

Later he says:

The condemnation of Gray's letters is Scotch taste. The dull writer says Gray never thought his letters would see the light. He does not perceive how much that circumstance enhances their merit. Nobody ever yet wrote letters so well.

With the possible exception of Cowper, one is inclined to agree. Walpole is too much a creature of moods and impulses to have been anything but a fallible critic, yet where he is neither obliged to flatter, nor moved by personal animus to condemn, one might rely on many worse guides. There is some good criticism in the letters to

Robert Jephson. They almost deserve to be quoted in their entirety :

I am still a little obstinate on one point, I mean in general, and that is metaphoric diction in tragedy ; and forgive me once more if I do not submit to your argument in its defence, that Shakespeare's, Beaumont and Fletcher's, and Massinger's pieces, though crowded with figures, are still tasted. I believe the figurative passages in Shakespeare are not the most admired. Dr. Johnson goes further, far beyond the truth, and says that the most sublime genius never attempted to be sublime without being bombast : but indubitably Shakespeare is never so superior to all mankind as when he is most simple and natural. Recollect Constance, Arthur, Juliet, Desdemona, or Hotspur's mockeries of Glendower. What strikes one's soul with horror like Macbeth's account of the two grooms when he has murdered Duncan ? The passage is foolishly ridiculed by Voltaire, because he is incapable of feeling that simplicity is the height of the sublime.

When he himself can his quietus make
With a bare bodkin,

Henry the Fourth's image of the cabin-boy *in a night so rude*, and Richard the Second's sensibility to his favourite horse being pleased with the load of Bolingbroke, are texts out of the book of Nature, in comparison of which the works of all other writers in every language that I understand are to me apocryphal.

This next is characteristic of his trifling mood, but he is writing to a lady.

The Library [Crabbe's] I have read. There are some pretty lines and easy verses, but it is too long. One thought is charming, 'that a dog, though a flatterer, is still a friend.' It made me give Tonton a warm kiss, and swear it was true.

He writes in a tone of exasperation to Mason, 'after being stupefied by Dr. Mille's wagonload of notes on Rowley':

They have all the dull impertinence of a Dutch commentary, an ostentatious parade of all he knows, to the purpose or not, accompanied with bombast preferences of Rowley to Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Homer, Virgil, and so on, and so on.

Of Fanny Burney Walpole writes :

Cecilia I did read, but besides its being immeasurably long, and written in Dr. Johnson's unnatural phrase, I like it far less than *Evelina*. I did delight in Mr. Briggs, and in the droll names he calls the proud gentleman, whose name I forgot.

After more reminiscences he concludes :

The great fault is that the authoress is so afraid of not making all her *dramatis personæ* act in character that she never lets them say a syllable but what is to mark their character, which is very unnatural, at least in the present state of things in which people are always aiming to disguise their ruling passions, or rather affect opposite qualities than hang out their propensities.

Had he lived longer, he might have cited in opposition the delicate art of Jane Austen, by which the weaknesses and dissimulations of the characters remain for long hidden to their companions in the story, but are usually made apparent to the reader. Walpole, it must be confessed, shares that common defect ascribed to his genus by Landor. 'His eyes, whether in carping or commanding, are both on one side like a turbot's.' Further, he is better at carping than at commanding. This, I think, marks a critic of the second rank. He has only to be set beside Lamb for the distinction between the higher, constructive criticism, and the lower, destructive, to be made evident. His merit is the merit of wit :

I have gotten three comfortably fat volumes in octavo of ancient French fabliaux, but they look more good-

humoured from their corpulency than from intrinsic gaiety, as many plump men do. I am diverted at present to a larger and stupendously magnificent work about nothing, two uncommonly tall quartos containing the memoirs of that singular being Thomas Hollis.

He dilates upon its absurdities, and closes :

In short, imagine the history of an old woman that goes to a mercer's to buy a bombazine, with etchings of the deaths of Brutus and Cassius.

Mason is the recipient of his most peevish complaints, but in some particulars of the following outbursts of vexation he has reason on his side :

Dr. Johnson has indubitably neither taste nor ear, no criterion of judgement but his old woman's prejudices : where they are wanting he has no rule at all. He prefers Smith's poetic but insipid and undramatic *Phaedra* and *Hippolytus* to Racine's *Phèdre*, the finest tragedy, in my opinion, of the French theatre, for with Voltaire's leave I think it infinitely preferable to *Iphigénie*, and so I do *Britannicus*, *Mahomet*, *Alzire*, and some others ; but I will allow Johnson to dislike Gray, Garth, Prior, aye, and every genius we have had, when he cries up Blackmore, Thomson, Akenside and Dr. King ; nay, I am glad that the measure of our dullness is full. I would have this era stigmatize itself in every respect, and be a proverb to the nations around and to future ages. We want but Popery to sanctify every act of blindness. Hume should burn the works of Locke, and Johnson of Milton, and the atheist and the bigot join in the same religious rites as they both were pensioned by the same piety. Oh, let us not have a ray of sense, or a throb of sensation left to distinguish us from brutes. Let total stupefaction palliate our fall, and let us resemble the Jews, who when they were to elect a God preferred a calf.

All this need not be taken too seriously, but if it be ridiculous to confound Thomson with Akenside and King, it

is surely the quintessence of absurdity to exalt Edmund Smith at the expense of Racine.

Still pursuing Johnson, he writes :

The machinery of *The Rape of the Lock* he calls ‘combination of skilful genius with happy casualty.’ In English, I guess, ‘a lucky thought.’ Pope’s house here he calls ‘the house to which his residence afterwards procured so much celebration’, and that ‘his vanity produced a grotto where necessity enforced a passage.’ Was poor good sense ever so unmercifully overlaid by a babbling old woman? How was it possible to marshal words so ridiculously? He seems to have read the ancients with no view but pilfering polysyllables. Hurlothrumbo talks plain English in comparison of this wight on stilts, but I doubt I have wearied you : send me something to put my mouth in taste.

If one has a mind to fall foul of an author there is usually material, and Johnson’s rough uncouth exterior presented many points of attack to a gadfly antagonist. Agile and ingenious Walpole certainly shows himself, and with his idol Gray to uphold, a barb is given to his resentment. He was scarcely less fond of Pope in a literary sense. The championship of either is creditable to him, but it blinds him to the real qualities of his opponent ; also he is at some pains to misunderstand him, which is not, perhaps, a discreet attitude for any critic.

Writing of Lord Carlisle’s tragedy, there is a pleasant reference to Dryden :

He [Carlisle, that is] has much improved the conduct and steered clear of the indelicacy and the absurdity of the original, which did not stop Dryden, who knowing that he could tell anything delightfully, did not mind what he told : how else could he have thought of making an old king sleep behind a bed instead of upon it?

In a letter to John Pinkerton, Walpole doubts whether

a good song can be written any longer, and questions whether even true simplicity would please.

Our present choir of poetic virgins write in the other extreme. They colour their compositions so highly with choice and dainty phrases, that their own dresses are not more fantastic and romantic. Their nightingales make as many divisions as Italian singers. There are two periods favourable to poets : a rude age when a genius may hazard anything and when nothing has been forestalled : the other is when, after ages of barbarism and incorrection, a master or two produces models formed by purity and taste. Virgil, Horace, Boileau, Corneille, Racine, and Pope exploded the licentiousness that reigned before them. What happened ? Nobody dared to write in contradiction to the severity established ; and very few had abilities to rival their masters. Insipidity ensues, novelty is dangerous, and bombast usurps the throne which has been debased by a race of *fainéants*. This rhapsody will probably convince you, sir, how mistaken you was in setting any value on my judgement.

If Walpole did not detect the germ of romanticism in Thomson and Collins, he admired Gray and Chatterton, and above all he discerned the weakness of a debased school of classical imitation. A reformer he was not by temperament, but his *Castle of Otranto* stumbled on a new track in prose fiction. His sympathies were with an older world.

On reading the rest of Gibbon, he writes to Thomas Barnett :

I finished Mr. Gibbon a full fortnight ago, and was extremely pleased. It is a most wonderful mass of information, not only on history, but almost on all the ingredients of history, as war, government, commerce, coin and what not. If it has a fault it is in embracing too much, and consequently in not detailing enough, and in striding backwards and forwards from one set of princes to another, and from one subject to another, so that without much historic knowledge, much memory and much method in

one's memory it is almost impossible not to be sometimes bewildered. The last chapter of the fourth volume I own made me recoil, and I could scarcely push through it. So far from being Catholic or heretic, I wished Mr. Gibbon had never heard of Monophysites, Nestorians, or any such fools. But the sixth volume made ample amends: Mahomet and the popes were gentlemen and good company.

Walpole is loud in his praise of the *Arabian Nights*, and prefers it to the *Aeneid* for imagination and invention.

If you could wade through two octavos of Dame Piozzi's 'thoughts' and 'sos' and 'I trows', and cannot listen to seven volumes of Scheherezade's narrations, I will sue for a divorce *in foro Parnassi*, and Boccalini shall be my proctor. The cause will be a counterpart to the sentence of the Lacedemonian who was condemned for breach of the peace, by saying in three words what he might have said in two.

The following letter is to Miss Mary Berry. As he grows older, he does not cultivate a taste for Thomson.

Lord Buchan is screwing out a little ephemeridan fame from instituting a jubilee for Thomson. I fear I shall not make my court to Mr. Berry by owning I would not give this last week's fine weather for all the four Seasons in blank verse. There is more nature in six lines of the Allegro and Penseroso, than in all the laboured imitation of Milton. What is there in Thomson of original?

We have no time to linger on the answer.

This is quite true of Robertson :

He has not the genius, penetration, sagacity, and art of Mr. Gibbon; he cannot melt his materials together and make them elucidate and even improve and produce new discoveries; in short he cannot, like Mr. Gibbon, make an original picture with some bits of mosaic.

In a letter to Roscoe he goes into details about the

relative merits of Petrarch and Lorenzo. This is not perhaps of much interest, but of the sonnet in general he writes :

It is a form of composition I do not love, and which is almost intolerable in any language but Italian, which furnishes such a profusion of rhymes. To our tongue the sonnet is mortal and the parent of insipidity. The imitation of it in some degree, was extremely noxious to a true poet, our Spenser. He was the more injudicious in lengthening his stanza in a language so barren of rhymes as ours is, and in which several words whose terminations are of similar sounds are so rugged, uncouth, and unmusical. The consequence was, that many lines which he forced into the service to complete the quota of his stanza are unmeaning or silly, or tending to weaken the thought he would express.

For my last quotation I go back to 1789. Walpole died in 1797, having lived for eighty years and corresponded for sixty. In a letter to Miss Berry he excuses himself for some ironical expression about her understanding, pays tribute to its strength and clearness, and proceeds :

As I hold my own [understanding] to be of a very inferior kind, and know it to be incapable of sound, deep application, I should have been very foolish if I had attempted to sneer at your pursuits. Mine have always been light and trifling, and tended to nothing but casual amusement, I will not say without a little vain ambition of showing some parts. My studies, if they could be called so, and my productions were alike desultory. In my latter age, I discovered the futility of both my objects and writings : I felt how insignificant is the representation of an author of mediocrity, and that, being no genius, I had only added one more name to a list of writers that had told the world nothing but what it could as well be without.

Horace Walpole states the case against himself more

pitilessly and more forcibly than his most malignant critics. He was conscious of being a trifler, and it is well he realized it, or we should have had more catalogues of noble authors, and anecdotes of painting, and fewer of his delightful letters. He did not spare his contemporaries, and in his own turn he was not spared. But neither does Walpole himself, nor do his enemies, give us the complete truth. He was a trifler, by choice, by birth, and by force of circumstances, but futile he most certainly was not. Plodding mediocrity could not deny him wit, but in self-defence it denied him wisdom. The balance of Macaulay's insufferable essay has been partly righted by the able hands of Sir Leslie Stephen and Mr. Austin Dobson. The letters themselves are his permanent defence. In them will be found, besides abundance of fancy, originality, and humour, evidence of an extensive acquaintance with literature ancient and modern, and a power of criticism which, if it cannot always inform, will never cease to delight.

VII

ENTHUSIASM

'SIR,' said Dr. Johnson, 'He is an enthusiast by rule.' Johnson's contemporaries understood this at once for a censure felicitously expressed. It costs us some mental effort to realize that the word 'enthusiast' was once in ill odour with respectable people. Johnson lived before the great enthusiastic poets who have given us our mental outlook, and it was only because Shelley had not yet written that 'enthusiast by rule' could be considered a term of abuse.

In criticizing the attitude of the early eighteenth century towards enthusiasm, we are face to face with a problem similar to that which has exercised theologians : the problem which centres round those enlightened pagans who lived before the time of grace. Can we justly criticize Socrates or Dr. Johnson from a point of view modified by later developments ? It is clear that we cannot ; and therefore it will be well to state at once that, though the subject of this essay makes it necessary to emphasize the unlovely features of the eighteenth century, we must not be taken to imply that there were no others.

The analogy between the Greeks and Queen Anne's men is more than a mere literary parallel ; the early eighteenth century is the one period in our history when English taste was really moving on Greek lines. It is true that Keats, as Shelley said, was a Greek ; but he was a romantic Greek ; if he cared for artistic form, he cared quite as much

for self-expression. There were many things which he intended to say.

But the Queen Anne's men cared above all for artistic form. Originality consisted, according to them, not in 'singing songs for ever new', but in saying 'what oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed'. They took their lessons in art, not from the idealism of Plato, as Spenser had done, but from the regulative wisdom of Aristotle, who has no word which covers our 'imagination'. And it is in this sense that their art was Greek. It is informed with the spirit of the best and most characteristic Greek sculpture. It is cool, restrained, and of exquisite finish. Addison's prose, and the Praxitelean Hermes, are products of the same impulse; Homer's *Iliad* and Pope's version of it are symptomatic of the same desire.

If this is true of their aesthetic theory, it is also true of their morals. The influence of Hobbes on English moral philosophy can hardly be overestimated. Even Locke, who was opposed to him in temperament, religion, and politics, accepts his Utilitarian view of human nature without reserve. And Hobbes's moral philosophy is a systematized version of the Epicureanism presented by Lucretius. Indeed, it is remarkable how he has managed to reproduce in prose the gloomy atmosphere of the Latin poem.

Now the spiritual force which has always been antagonistic to Epicureanism, and to that particular kind of art on which Aristotle's *Poetics* is the best commentary, is Christianity. Take a Peloponnesian figure of an athlete, a young man binding his head with the fillet of victory. He is proportioned according to the Polyclitan canon; the easy pose in which he stands is the culmination of a long convention; he is a perfect embodiment of health and strength and happiness. Then set over against him

a figure from the niche of some Gothic cathedral. The mechanical and conventional elements are both there, coupled with an enormous inferiority in technique. His drapery is flat and absurdly unconvincing. But he is a martyr; he holds his severed head in his hands. Both figures are symbolical of victory, but the martyr's victory is one in which death is swallowed up; his humility is the humility of one who has overcome the world. He may say with the psalmist, 'I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of ungodliness.'

The athlete's humility is different; it is based on the smallness of his triumph. He has not overcome the world; he has not dared to look on death. He says with Achilles :—

*βούλοιμην κ' ἐπάρουρος ἐὼν θητενέμεν ἄλλῳ,
ἀνδρὶ παρ' ἀκλήρῳ, φό μὴ βίστος πολὺς εἴη,
ἢ πᾶσιν νεκύεσσι καταφθιμένοισιν ἀνάσσειν.*

My object is not to write a panegyric of Christianity, but merely to point out that as an art of living it is infinitely preferable to any other because it deals more comprehensively with the facts of existence. It does not shun evil like Epicureanism, nor endure it grimly like Stoicism; it enters the lists with Satan, saying, 'Evil, be thou my good.' And the farther the field of conquest is extended, the more daring does art become. The martyr in the niche has atoned even for his sins against artistic proportion. He is only grotesque to a Greek. In short, it is precisely because Christ suffered agony on the tree that the artistic representation of that agony is endurable.

That this has a bearing on the eighteenth century in England is, I think, indisputable. For while, as I have said, the Queen Anne's men were under the spell of Greek rationalism in art and morals, they had, generally speak-

ing, no real Christianity. It is true that there were pious souls, like Dr. Johnson, who by superhuman efforts of will, managed to get spiritual sustenance from the theological stones which the Church had substituted for the bread of life. But the process was a kind of Christian Science. The true inward meaning of Christianity was, generally speaking, obscured. The platonic idealism which Christianity adopted in early times was as heathen Greek even to the bishops. ‘You would be better employed’, said Archbishop Drummond to Mr. Conyers, ‘preaching the ethics of Socrates, than canting about this new birth’;—a remark which cuts both ways. They needed a new Pentecost to awaken their idealistic faculties and make them speak in something more than sound prose. Bishop Clarke thus defines the sin against the Holy Ghost. It is ‘a perverse refusal to be convinced, on the highest evidence, of the truths of Christianity.’

The Bishop of London (Sherlock) in 1727, speaking of the Slave Trade, said: ‘Christianity and the embracing of the Gospel does not make the least difference in civil property.’ The same bishop thus argues for religion: ‘It is ten to one religion is true. If it turns out to be false the Christian has only lost one-tenth of the amount staked. If it turns out to be true the sinner has made a very poor bargain indeed.’ When bishops were making such uninspired utterances it is a matter for little wonder that a layman, as Lady Mary Montagu records, made the cynical proposal that the word ‘not’ should be taken out of the Ten Commandments and inserted in the Creed. We can understand the feelings of a pamphleteer (*Proposal for the National Reformation of Manners*, 1694) who said, ‘our light looks like the evening of the world.’

This decadence of Christianity was due in a large

measure to the utilitarian ethics with which society was imbued. But there were at least two special causes. The Church produced by the revolution was little more than a makeshift. It was adopted for the sake of peace, not because it satisfied the individual soul. Men feared the Leveller, Quaker, and Enthusiast as persons who might subvert the social order and bring back the horrors of the Civil Wars. Rather than repeat the dangerous process of dictating to the conscience of others, they forced their own. The consequence was that the restored Church was as dogmatic as the one it superseded. Reformers could not have been viewed with more suspicion by Laud himself.

This is well illustrated by a tract of 1674, called the *Dangers of Enthusiasm, urged against the Quakers.*

You hold that the Holy Spirit directs and persuades men what to believe and do by his immediate working, without outward teaching; whereas we say he doth it by outward teaching; It is God the Holy Spirit that works the saving change in men, but he doth it still by the word of the Gospel.

It concludes thus :—

I have been longer upon the point of your enthusiasm, by which you set up a new method of your own in opposition to God's method of bringing men to the Christian belief and life, because I deem it a mother and master error to many others which you hold, . . . whereby you are brought to a wilderness of odd conceits.

The pamphleteer is evidently trying to be fair; but surely a mind which sees in the magnificent idealism of the Quakers only a 'wilderness of odd conceits', must be either wilfully ignorant or unchristian in the fullest sense.

The other reason for the decadence of Christianity, and indeed of religion in general, was philosophical.

The theory of divine right, which had been attacked in practice by the Puritans and undermined in theory by Hobbes, had a profound relation with theology. Since the king was the divine representative on earth, it was only natural that the conception of God's relations with His creation should be founded by analogy on the relations of king and subject. But the analogy had been made impossible by Hobbes. Men could hardly conceive of God as existing in virtue of their united suffrages. Further, the enormous advance made by Newton, Boyle, and others in Physical Science had widened men's notions of the Universe. The Christian myth no longer seemed adequate to embody the facts. The God of the Deists produced by the new science and metaphysics was an abstraction, removed from real life by numerous hypotheses. Like the Corinthians, they had set up an altar 'to the Unknown God', and, as in the days of Eli, there was no vision :—

No shrine, no grove, no oracle, no heat
Of pale-mouthed prophet dreaming.

It is not surprising that the final result on the individual mind was scepticism, not only of Christianity, but of religion as a whole. They were in a sense in a worse state than the decadent Greeks : they were too circumscribed to wish 'to see or hear some new thing'. If they allowed themselves a literary enthusiasm, it was for the unenthusiastic writers among the ancients ; if they allowed themselves an enthusiasm in morals, it was for the dreary Stoicism of Cato. A man might not even have a 'ruling passion' without being subject to satire. Hence arose that kind of humility which is the characteristic of most serious literature at the beginning of the century (for instance, *The Essay on Man*'), and which reached a climax in poems like Pomfret's *Choice*.

No doubt Pomfret thought he was expressing the humility of the Christian ; it is really the diffident meanness of the Epicurean. The wine of his poetry was pressed from sour grapes.

This general attitude to life was what eighteenth-century writers meant by that comprehensive phrase 'Common Sense'. But we must not let the uncongenial philosophy on which it is based blind us to its true value. 'Common Sense' meant more to Queen Anne's men than mere caution ; it might also be rendered by the phrase 'Social Sense', for it implied the opinion of a large number of competent judges, 'fit audience though many'. Never has popular taste, even in Athens, so nearly played the part of an Academy of Letters.

The opposite of Common Sense in eighteenth-century literature is Enthusiasm ; and this is the justification for trying to fix the meaning of the former term. Anything which tended to disturb the mental attitude which I have tried to sketch, was indicated by this 'obscure Greek word'. The definition of Enthusiasm is that it is the negation of the eighteenth century point of view. Now the object of this essay is to suggest very briefly the connexion between the eighteenth century and the enthusiastic age which immediately succeeded it ; to show how Enthusiasm finally vanquished Common Sense. The process was, as might be expected, connected with Christianity.

From what has been said above about the decadence of Christianity and the growth of Deism, it seems clear that the victory of Enthusiasm could only be achieved in two ways : either by realizing anew the truths embodied in the Christian myth (a method which ignored the claims of science), or with the help of an improved metaphysic, by giving the abstract God of the scientists

some earthly symbol by which they might be adequately expressed. The first of these methods is associated with the name of John Wesley, the second with that of Bishop Berkeley and with the nature poets. It will be clearer to take them in order.

'Enthusiasm' as a technical term is applied especially to the former class of innovators. The pamphlet on *The Dangers of Enthusiasm*, already quoted, establishes the true meaning; it is an attempt to receive the Holy Spirit otherwise than through the channel provided by the Church. A glance at the dictionary will show that this technical definition covers most of the quotations. Burton's (*Anatomy*, 1621) remark is typical: 'of prophets, Enthusians, and Impostors, our ecclesiastical stories afford many examples.'

Hickman in 1647 says, 'Nothing made the Anabaptists so infamous as their pretended enthusiasms and revelations.' Hume, in his admirable essay on superstition and enthusiasm, argues that superstition is favourable to priestly power, and enthusiasm 'not less contrary to it than sound reason and philosophy.' But this merit was hidden from the eyes of Hume's predecessors. In all these quotations the word has the same connotation. It may be illustrated from several pamphlets.

In 1708 some of the Camisards, refugees from the French wars of religion, were in London. They were Enthusiasts in the full sense, and the extent of their spiritual independence may be gauged by the fact that they had applied for leave to raise a corpse in St. Paul's Churchyard. This lack of common sense produced a storm of opposition. Enthusiasm became the topic of the day, and there were many who considered that a serious danger to society was being overlooked. Shaftesbury's *Letters to a Noble Lord* (1708) is a criticism of the alarmists, and exhibits that

shade of unconcern which Pater calls 'the perfect manner of the eighteenth century'. It reflects so well the attitude of the time to religion that several passages are worth quoting.

The melancholy way in which we have been taught religion [he says] makes us unapt to think of it in a good humour. It is in adversity chiefly, or in ill health, under affliction or disturbance of mind or discomposure of temper, that we have chiefly recourse to it; though in reality we are never so unfit to think of it as at such a dark hour. . . . Then it is we see Wrath and Fury and Revenge and Terrors in the Deity. . . . In short, my lord, the melancholy way of treating religion is that which renders it so tragical. . . . And my notion is, that provided we treat religion with good manners, we can never use too much good humour, or examine it with too much freedom and familiarity.

This surely betokens a healthier frame of mind than that enjoyed by some of his contemporaries, who were orthodox for political reasons. He criticizes these :—

Now uniformity of opinion (a hopeful project) is looked on as the only expedient against this evil [Enthusiasm]. The saving of men's souls is now the heroic passion of exalted spirits, and is become in a measure the chief care of the magistrate, and the very end of government itself. . . . But I am sure the only way to save men's sense, is to give liberty to wit.

He proceeds to apply the word in an untechnical sense :—

We may treat other enthusiasms as we please. We may ridicule love or gallantry or knight errantry to the utmost, and we feel that in these latter days of wit, the humour of this kind, which was once so prevalent, is pretty well declined. The Crusaders, the rescuing of Holy Lands, and such devout gallantries are in less request than formerly. [Shaftesbury was not meant for a Crusader.] But if something of this militant religion, something of this soul-

rescuing spirit and saint-errantry prevails still, we need not wonder, when we consider in how solemn a manner we treat this distemper, and how preposterously we go about to cure enthusiasm. . . . Good humour is not only the best security against enthusiasm, but the best foundation of piety and true religion.

This brilliant pamphlet by the author of the *Characteristics* is worth reading, not only for the light which it throws on the subject, but also for the style. It offended some readers because of the Atheism which it seemed to imply.

Wotton, in his *Enquiry after Wit*, says: ‘He did not take care throughout his letter to distinguish duly between religion and enthusiasm, but has made several horrible jumbles which are not less silly than they are profane.’

But Shaftesbury did make the distinction. ‘Inspiration’, he said, ‘is a real feeling of the divine presence and enthusiasm a false one.’ Of course he means that inspiration is that feeling which the consensus of cultivated opinion would call real. The answer to this is that a feeling must be real to the person who feels it, and cannot be real to any one else. The writer of *Enthusiasm Explained*, 1739, does not, any more than Shaftesbury, surmount this difficulty when he says:—

Surely the spirit of illumination which resides in the souls of the faithful, is a principle of the purest reason that is communicable to the human nature.

He means that orthodox enthusiasm is reasonable, but he does not help us to distinguish enthusiasm from inspiration.

A writer of *Remarks* on Shaftesbury’s letter gives a pathological account of the phenomenon.

Enthusiasm [he says] may be, in short, wholly resolved into brains well heated with thought, and especially in

those in whom the melancholic humour is predominant. . . . But I know not why this should be called by the obscure Greek name 'enthusiasm', rather than by our own plain English one 'distraction'.

The idea that enthusiasm is a phase of the melancholic humour is expanded by the Author of *The Nature of Enthusiasm* :—

I shall easily demonstrate that the very nature of melancholy is such that it may more fairly and plausibly tempt a man into such conceits of inspiration and supernatural light from God, than it can possibly do in those more extravagant conceits of being glass, butter, a bird, a beast, or any such thing.

It is typical of eighteenth-century thought that to believe oneself inspired by God seemed less extravagant than to believe oneself butter, but more irritating.

'The melancholic', he proceeds, 'is the most religious complexion that is, and will be as naturally tampering with divine matters as apes and monkeys will be imitating the actions and manners of men.'

He concludes that enthusiasm is a 'kind of natural inebriation' which may be cured by 'temperance, humility, and reason.'

The literature of the period is full of references to the subject, but these quotations have been selected because they show what the world meant when it applied the word enthusiast to John Wesley. They explain, for instance, a letter from his brother Samuel which runs thus :—

Falling into enthusiasm is being lost without a witness. I pleased myself with the expectation of seeing Jack, but now that is over, and I am afraid of it. I heartily pray God to stop the progress of this lunacy.

The world was hardly more bitter. A broadsheet of 1739

represents a Methodist preacher surrounded by the figures of Hypocrisy, Deceit, and Folly. The verse is :—

Once in an age that pest of common sense—
Enthusiasm, revives his old pretence ;
Clad like Simplicity, he stalks along,
And draws behind him the deluded throng.
Lives like a comet's his protracted train,
And warms the world till he returns again,
With doctrine borrowed from the Kirk of Knox,
And journal gravely copied from George Fox.

This shows that they recognized the spirit of Wesley as the spirit of the great reformers, but they could see nothing good in it.

To give any account of Wesley's enthusiasm would be far beyond the scope of this essay ; it lives still in the energy and the 'soul-rescuing spirit' which is presented to our minds whenever we think of Methodism. Our business is rather with his critics.

The Spiritual Quixote, a novel by Dr. Greaves, is typical of the best literature which Wesley's enthusiasm provoked, in that it shows an attempt to be just. Whitefield is introduced into the story without any unfair comment, and of Wesley Greaves says that 'he had no intention of separating himself from the established Church, and generally adhered to its most essential doctrines.' (It was only in later life that Wesley 'acted very ugly enthusiasms', as Walpole says, by consecrating ministers.)

Greaves's novel is the story (founded on facts in the life of a Mr. Townshend) of how Mr. Wildgoose, having put himself into a difficult position at home, with regard to his mother's chambermaid, is seized with the prevailing spirit of Methodism, and having chosen as his Sancho Panza, the worthy Tugwell, sets out as a true 'saint-errant'. The idea

had been suggested to him by ‘an old book by one of those self-taught teachers and self-called pastors of the flock in the time of Cromwell’s usurpation.’ Mr. Wildgoose meets Whitefield at Bristol, is inspired to preach, and soon learns the Methodist style, ‘which consists chiefly in a figurative application of the most sensuous expressions and sensual ideas to spiritual subjects; and which have been observed frequently to captivate the hearts of the most profligate, and lull them into a strong persuasion at least that they have received lively foretastes of the joys of heaven.’

It may be remarked that this is quite untrue of Wesley’s sermons, as we have them. The *Spiritual Quixote* is remarkable, not so much for its literary merit, which is not great, as for the temperate tone in which the spiritual movement is generally treated. Greaves is too gentle to be a satirist; to him ‘pardon’ is the word for all.’ Thus Mr. Wildgoose, after many adventures, some of a slightly improper character, gives up his craze, marries, and settles down in the country.

A pamphlet called *A Lash at Enthusiasm* (1778) is really a satire on the opponents of Methodism. It is a dialogue between Mrs. Clinker and Miss Martha Steady. The latter has been captivated by Mr. Jewel, a Methodist preacher, and in argument seems to triumph over the conservative Mrs. Clinker.

Mrs. Clink. But I desire to know by what rule you judge that Mr. Jewel’s doctrine is sound and true?

Miss M. Steady. First, by bringing it to the only touchstone of truth and falsehood, the Word of God. Secondly, by comparing it with an authority which I hope always to esteem next to the Scripture itself, the Church of England in the liturgy, articles, and homilies.

Mrs. Clink. Articles and homilies! Mercy on us, child! what are these? . . . To deal plainly with you, Miss Patty, nothing could be more disgusting to me than to hear so

much about the Spirit and inspiration, as I look upon every-thing of that sort to be little better than cant and enthusiasm. . . . A person either wants good breeding, or is a very great enthusiast, who talks so much about religion.

The laugh is really against Mrs. Clinker in all this. Miss Steady, though virtuous, is rather severe on 'cakes and ale'; her disapproval of cards leads her to tell a shocking story.

You know Mrs. Dealer [she says]. Nobody more constant at cards every evening, nobody more regular at church every morning than herself. It was but the other day that, coming into the pew when the Psalms were reading, she asked the lady next her what was trump, meaning to inquire what day of the month it was.

Appended to the pamphlet is 'An Evening Conversation between four very good old Ladies over a comfortable Game of Quadrille.' The point of view is the same as in the pamphlet just noticed.

1st Lady. I have had a melancholy piece of news to-day in a letter from my good friend, Mrs. Formal; she tells me that Mr. Formal's eldest son is certainly turned Methodist!

2nd Lady. Turned Methodist! Sure, you don't say so! I'm certain, if it is true, it will be a great grief to his parents, who are very worthy good sort of people as ever lived.—Pray, ma'am, did you play *Basto*?

3rd Lady. I ask leave. Hearts and the king of diamonds.

4th Lady. Indeed, Mr. and Mrs. Formal are much to be pitied, for they have had a great many undeserved afflictions in the family. I think it is but lately that their eldest daughter died of a violent fever, and now their son is turned Methodist.—*Spadille*.

3rd Lady. Pray, ma'am, what is a Methodist?

4th Lady. Indeed, ma'am, I don't know.—*Manille*.

1st Lady. O lord! ma'am, its something very bad. I have heard Mr. Caecus the subdean, who, you know,

generally makes a fourth at our private parties, preach two excellent sermons against them. He told us . . . that they denied good Christians the innocent amusements of life.

All. Oh! shocking! shocking!

Now though these pamphlets have distinct merits as literature, it is fair to say that they are not truly enthusiastic. They are argumentative; and a man cannot be deeply enthusiastic if argument satisfies him. They are humorous; and Shaftesbury said truly that enthusiasm is related to melancholy. They are enthusiastic only in the sense that enthusiasm has become a subject about which they can argue without passion. But was the enthusiasm of Wesley really expressed in literature? Did it produce any poetry? The answer is to be found in the words of John Byrom.

John Byrom was a friend of Law, whose *Serious Call* influenced Wesley almost as much as the *Imitatio*, and is perhaps the first enthusiastic book in the eighteenth century. Byrom versified Law's defence of enthusiasm, and might therefore be expected to exhibit enthusiastic tendencies in his general verse. How far the expectation is justified remains to be seen. His poem on enthusiasm (1751) is worth quoting:—

A book perhaps, beyond the vulgar page,
Removes at once the lumber of an age;
Truth is presented; strikes upon our eyes;
We feel conviction and we fear surprise;
We gaze, admire, dispute, and then the bawl,
'Fly from enthusiasm',—that answers all.

He argues that enthusiasm is inevitable, and inspires all human activity; it is in fact with him another phrase for 'the ruling passion'.

You need not go to cloisters or to cells,
Monks, or field preachers, to see where it dwells;

It dwells alike in balls and masquerades,
Courts, camps and 'changes it alike pervades.

One man politely, seized with classic rage,
Dotes on old Rome and its Augustan age;
Another's heated brain is painted o'er
With ancient hieroglyphic marks of yore;
He old Egyptian mummies can explain
And raise them up almost to life again,
To vex old matters chronicled in Greek,
While those of his own parish are to seek;—
What can come forth from such an antic taste
But a 'Clarissimus Enthusiast'?
Fly from enthusiasm? Yes, fly from air,
And breathe it more intensely for your care!

He argues that since it is inevitable in some form, a religious enthusiasm is better than any other. Seek and find the Holy Spirit, he says, and

In this enthusiasm, advanced thus high,
'Tis a true Christian's wish to live and die.

So far, well. But if we look through Byrom's works for anything boisterous, we find things like the 'Caution against Despair'. Note the 'devil-may-care' rhythm:—

Despair is a cowardly thing,
And the Spirit suggesting it bad!
In spite of my sins I will sing
That mercy is still to be had.

For the use of 'thing' in the first line compare Wordsworth, 'Old, unhappy, far-off things.' Perhaps, as Browning says, 'It all comes to the same thing in the end.'

It goes on:—

O! comfort thyself in His love,
Poor sinful and sorrowful soul,
Who came, and still comes, from above
To the sick that would fain be made whole;

Who said, and continues to say,
 In the deep of the penitent breast,
 'Come, sinner, to me, come away!
 I'll meet thee and bring thee to rest.'

A refusal to come is absurd !
 I'll put myself under His care,
 I'll believe His infallible word,
 And never, no, never despair !

It cannot be denied that there is a sort of enthusiasm in this, but it is not the sort which makes poetry. In the following it degenerates into patient argumentativeness :—

An Argument for David's Belief in a future State inferred from Bathsheba's last words to him on his deathbed.

If David knew not of a future life,
 How understood he Bathsheba his wife,
 Who, when he lay upon his deathbed, came
 To plead for Solomon's succeeding claim ;
 And, having prospered in her own endeavour,
 Said, 'Let my lord, king David, live for ever' ?

If she had prayed for David's mild release,
 Or 'Let my lord, the king, depart in peace',
 The short-liv'd comment might have some pretence :
 But live for ever has no sort of sense,
 Unless we grant her meaning to extend
 To future life, that never has an end.

If ever an anthology is made of 'Passions that might have been expressed differently', John Byrom's poems should occupy several of its pages. They are examples of the kind of poetry which was in Johnson's mind when he denied the possibility of religious poetry. The Methodist enthusiasm found its expression not in poetical but in theological language, simplified for the benefit of the ignorant, and even Donne could not make theology into

poetry. We find little poetry in the hymns of Wesley himself. But if Methodism produced no poetry worthy of the name, it had far-reaching effects on the artistic taste of the people. It is true that in itself it abjured the artistic embellishments with which a religion almost inevitably adorns its service. It was a voice crying in the wilderness. But it affected art by rousing the sluggish spirit of the historical Church. The opponents of Wesley could object to the form of his Christianity only if they could prove that they were possessed of a spirit as efficient and divine. The consequent resuscitation of Christian idealism probably produced many changes in art and literature. It is, I think, more than a coincidence that after using the word 'Gothic' as a term of abuse for the greater part of the century, towards the end they had a 'Gothic craze', as is evident from passages, for instance, in Madame D'Arblay's *Diary*. It is striking too, after an age when Toland proved 'Christianity not mysterious', and when all critics approved Horace's maxim—

‘Ne coram populo pueros Medea trucidet’—

that Mrs. Radcliffe wrote tales full of mystery and blood. Christianity is a thing of mystery and blood, and though its connexion with Mrs. Radcliffe's novels is not in other respects obvious, it is significant that men appreciated both at the same time. It is at least worth considering, whether Mrs. Radcliffe's novels are not to Christianity in some degree as a 'mascot' is to its original.

But the important point is that the Methodist enthusiasm produced no good poetry, and if we wish to discover how the great Romantic poets of the Revolution arose from the débris of dogma which the eighteenth century called 'common sense,' we must turn to the second line of enthusiastic development by which the religious spirit found

a new symbol for its experience. It is really the process by which the God of the Deists was provided with a temple. Although this is properly a question of metaphysic which may best be studied in the philosophy of Locke and Berkeley, its effect on literature was so great that no apology is needed for its introduction in this paper. Berkeley's philosophy, compared with Locke's, is enthusiastic almost in the technical sense, for while Locke believes that his 'impressions' are determined immediately by 'substance', Berkeley considers that his impressions are determined immediately by the Eternal Spirit. Locke's God is a hypothesis necessary to explain the connexion between my 'impression' and the inert 'substance' to which it refers; Berkeley's God is the inner meaning of his impressions. Berkeley might use the words which Wesley used so often: 'The Spirit beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God,' for in his eyes Nature was the 'Divine language.' This is enthusiastic in the technical sense; it contradicts the writer on the *Dangers of Enthusiasm* quoted above, who said, 'It is the Holy Spirit that works the saving change, but He doth it still by the word of the Gospel.' Berkeley's metaphysic is an excellent commentary on the nature poetry of the century. Whether the metaphysic produced the poetry, or whether both were symptomatic of something more profound, it is impossible to say.

Thomson's *Seasons* (1726-30) exhibit the germ of the process, for we find in them an appreciation of natural beauties coupled with a great interest in natural science. In his poem on Sir Isaac Newton, he speaks of the spectrum:—

Did ever poet image aught so fair
Dreaming in whisp'ring groves by the hoarse brook?
Or prophet, to whose rapture Heaven descends?

Ev'n now the setting sun and shifting clouds
Seen, Greenwich, from thy lovely heights, declare
How just, how beauteous the refractive law!

His scientific enthusiasm is almost a nuisance ; he gives an accurate account of the cold in Lapland, of the nesting-places of birds, of the formation of rivers by capillary attraction through a sandy substratum, and of the fertilization of flowers. The following description of the effects of rain is typical :—

Still night succeeds
A soften'd shade, and saturated earth
Awaits the morning beam, to give to light,
Rais'd through ten thousand different plastic tubes
The balmy treasures of the former day.

Thomson really anticipates the later nature poets in his attempt to read something more into nature than is presented to the eye.

It is in Hervey's *Meditations in a Flower Garden* (1746) that we find the first recognition of the idea that nature symbolizes something divine. Much of his meditation is in the style of the old emblem books. For instance, speaking of the sunlight :—

It penetrates the beds of metals, and finds its way to the place of the Sapphires. It tinctures the seeds of gold that are ripening into ore, and throws a brilliancy into the water of the Diamond that is hardening on its rock. . . . Just in the same manner were the Rational world dead in trespasses and sins without the reviving energy of Jesus Christ.

Another quotation bears witness to his observation :—

In a grove of tulips, or a knot of pinks, one perceives a difference in almost every individual ; scarce any two are turned and tinctured alike ; they are various and yet the same. . . . A pretty emblem, this, of the differences between Protestant Christians.

The best comment on this is his own :—

To an attentive mind the garden turns preacher, and its blooming tenants are so many lively sermons.

But some passages, in spite of their hectic style, breathe a finer spirit :—

Methinks I discern a thousand admirable properties in the Sun. 'Tis certainly the best material emblem of the Creator. *There* is more of lustre, energy and usefulness than in any other visible being. To worship it as a Deity was the least inexcusable of all the heathen idolatries. One scarce can wonder that fallen Reason should mistake so fair a copy for the adorable original.

Here he is forgetting his emblems. He forgets them entirely in the following :—

While the little hills clap their hands, and the luxuriant valleys laugh and sing, who can forbear catching the general joy ? Who is not touched with lively sensations of pleasure ?

It is an anticlimax when we turn the page and find him saying, 'Let us all be heliotropes to the Sun of Righteousness.' Hervey's *Meditations* are most important in the history of English nature poetry. Sir Leslie Stephen considers him a link between Wordsworth and the Deists. It is a curious coincidence that he was a friend of Wesley at Oxford, and therefore may be called a link between the two enthusiastic movements which this paper is an attempt to sketch. That he influenced Cowper is certain ; there is, at least, one verbal reminiscence in *The Task*. Hervey, comparing education to gardening, says :—

Let a holy discipline clear the soil ; let sacred instructions sow it with the best seed. Let Skill and Vigilance dress the rising shoots ; direct the young ideas how to spread.

This must have produced the notorious line :—

To teach the young idea how to shoot.

Hence we are not surprised when we find that Cowper's general attitude towards nature is like that of Hervey. He describes an oak tree or a mole, and afterwards moralizes upon it. It is in his accuracy of description that he is superior to any of his predecessors.

At this point Berkeley is illuminating, for it is a corollary to his metaphysic that we should study our 'impressions' with all care. With Locke our 'impressions' are less valuable; they may mislead us with regard to 'substance', which alone is real. Berkeley regards the 'impressions' themselves as real.

It is a significant fact that Cowper had read some of the Phenomenalist Philosophers, as is clear from *Anti-Thelyphthora*. It is true that the reference is satirical; but then it must be remembered that Cowper's insanity took a philosophical form, it was a kind of Necessitarianism (common at the beginning of the century) coupled with the conviction that he himself was one of the necessarily unfortunate. In saner moments Cowper probably regarded all metaphysical speculation as a 'weapon of the enemy'. But it is impossible to believe that the writer of the following was on the same plane of metaphysical belief as the writer of *Windsor Forest*. It has a lyrical passion which overflows the blank verse.

Laburnum rich

In streaming gold, syringa iv'ry pure;
The scentless and the scented rose, this red
And of an humbler growth; the other tall,
And throwing up into the darkest shade
Of neighb'ring cypress, or more sable yew
Her silver globes, light as the foamy surf
Which the wind severs from the broken wave.

To go on to discuss the great Romantic poets would be beyond the scope of this essay. As Professor Bradley has lately pointed out, there are curious parallels to be found between the poetry of the Revolutionary poets and the German thought of the time¹; and Wordsworth, for instance, was influenced through Coleridge by far more philosophy than he realized. But this essay will not have failed in its object, if it has made clear that the enthusiasm of Wordsworth had an English genealogy. In his work we find the last step in the process. Nature is to him and to Shelley and to Coleridge and to Keats more than an arbitrary symbol ('divine visual language', in Berkeley's phrase), it is a necessary symbol of the divine, and truly expresses it.

This kind of pantheism can be called pagan or Greek only in a very limited sense. If the poets of the Revolution were Greeks, they were romantic Greeks, like the good men who lived before Agamemnon. They were not like the Greeks of history, because they were consumed with the desire of expressing great truths. They had found in nature a symbol which could express far more than it could to the Greeks. Wordsworth in his sonnet 'The world is too much with us' has shown that he realized this. The paganism, if such it can be called, is autochthonous and Christian; it dares to treat of mystery and pain. 'The Leech-Gatherer' would be unendurable to a classical Epicurean, 'Michael' would be intolerable even to a Stoic.

And it is just because Wordsworth's 'paganism' was in its essence Christian, that we find the nature symbol and the Christian symbol side by side in his works. He was great enough to realize that there was no incongruity. A

¹ Adamson Lecture 1909.

lesser poet like Coleridge found difficulty in reconciling the two, and in the extraordinary poem called the 'Aeolian Harp' it is easy to see how his inspiration comes where the nature symbol dominates, and how it flags when the Christian symbol begins. Shelley was small enough to believe that the nature symbol is antagonistic to the Christian; he used both for a fine contrast in *Prometheus Unbound*. But even Shelley was not a Greek; unimpassioned regularity was beyond him; he only succeeded in being 'an enthusiast by rule'.

The plan of this essay was to give some slight account of two developments in eighteenth-century thought; first, the enthusiasm which arose within the Church, and which produced no poetry; and secondly, the enthusiasm which permeated philosophy and poetry, until it gave us the modern meaning of the word. The former alone is 'enthusiasm' in the technical sense, but, as some of the quotations have shown, the word was used in a sense wide enough to justify the inclusion of the latter. Even Dryden, the father of eighteenth-century criticism, says that poetry affects us 'by a kind of enthusiasm, or extraordinary emotion of the soul'.

He was perfectly right. Poetry is, in its own nature, enthusiasm in the technical sense. It is receiving the Holy Spirit otherwise than 'through the word of the Gospel'. It is the one grand heresy which alone is orthodox, and, in a temple not made with hands, its believers celebrate a perpetual sacrament.

VIII

WILLIAM LISLE BOWLES

IN the transition from the poetry of the eighteenth century to the poetry of the Romantic Movement, no critic has been able to put down his finger and say, ‘Here the old ended, the new began.’ Indeed, the lover of paradox might plausibly assert that the transition dates from the birth of the older school. But no critic could deny the paramount importance of the *Lyrical Ballads*, as the unmistakable manifesto of the later poetry. If, then, by his art a poet can be shown to have affected the two authors of that book, he may be reasonably regarded as having borne a share in the creation of the new forms. And if, in addition he assailed the criterions of the earlier faith in such a way as to provoke the bitter retaliation of its defenders, he may be said to have contributed, not only to the inception of another practice, but also to the erection of a new theory. Such a poet, and such a critic, was Bowles; it is in these two capacities that he will be here regarded.

Not, indeed, that this was the full extent of his activities. In a life of eighty-eight years, he combined also the offices of country parson, cathedral dignitary, defender of the public school system, antiquarian, and musician. But these we will pass by, as alien to our purpose; only remarking that the *Dictionary of National Biography* pronounces him to have been a capable archaeologist, and premising that his studies in that direction, as in music, were not without effect upon his poetry. We shall turn rather to a brief

narration of the dates and incidents of his life, never more important, perhaps, than in the consideration of a poet of transition.

William Lisle Bowles was born at King's Sutton, Northamptonshire, in 1762, his father being vicar there. He was thus eight years older than Wordsworth, whose life his own completely overlapped; for both died in 1850. Coleridge he antedated by ten years. Most of Bowles's earliest years were spent in that district which was to be the birthplace of the *Lyrical Ballads*, his father holding the living of Uphill in Somersetshire, and himself receiving his first instruction in Bleadon parsonage. In 1776 Bowles was entered on the foundation of Winchester School, the headmaster at that time being Dr. Joseph Warton. From the captaincy of the school, he was elected in 1781 a scholar of Trinity College, Oxford; Thomas Warton, then professor of poetry, being senior fellow. In 1783 he was Chancellor's prizeman for a copy of Latin verses, entitled *Calpe Obsessa, or the Siege of Gibraltar*. In 1792 he took his Master's degree, and was ordained to the curacy of Donhead St. Andrew in Wiltshire. After holding the livings of Chicklade in Wiltshire and Dumbleton in Gloucestershire, he was presented, in 1804, to Bremhill in Wiltshire; and it was here that he received visits from Coleridge, Southey, Rogers, Crabbe, Sir George Beaumont, Sir Humphrey Davey, Moore, and Madame de Staël. In 1804, also, he was collated to a prebendal stall in the cathedral of Salisbury; and in 1818 was appointed chaplain to the Prince Regent. In 1828 he became a canon residentiary of Salisbury. In 1850 he died.

There is thus, in the bare outline of his life, a certain parallelism to be observed with those of Wordsworth and Coleridge. In childhood he is brought up in susceptibility

to Nature ; and his *Banwell Hill* is a sort of feebler *Prelude*, setting forth this education.

I was a child when first I heard the sound
Of the great Sea !—'Twas night, and journeying far,
We were belated on our road, 'mid scenes
New and unknown,—a mother and her child. . .
When, as the wheels went slow, and the still night
Seem'd listening, a low murmur met the ear,
Not of the winds :—my mother softly said,
'Listen ! it is the Sea !' With breathless awe,
I heard the sound, and closer press'd her hand.

Thence he was transferred to the care of Joseph Warton, who set before him a severity of standard in literature, and introduced him to our older authors. After this followed a period of wandering and unrest ; while in later life he became an active supporter of the Established Church, his *Banwell Hill* corresponding, from this point of view, to the teaching of the *Excursion*, and his prose pamphlets being the counterpart of the theological discourses of Coleridge.

Bowles, however, was something much more than merely analogous in development to these two poets. He exercised a direct poetical influence upon them, as upon others of the earlier writers of the Romantic movement. The first and best known of his formative works was the volume originally published in 1789, with the title *Fourteen Sonnets written chiefly on Picturesque Spots during a Journey*. The occasion of these sonnets was a disappointment in love—not, as Gilfillan states in his edition, his rejection by a niece of Sir Samuel Romilly, on the ground of his lack of means, though that also befell him ; but rather—as, indeed, appears from passages in his poems—the loss of the lady of his affections through death. In consequence, Bowles journeyed for some time through the north of England, Scotland, and parts of the Continent ;

and sought to console himself with the composition of his sonnets.

The work, therefore, was the result of a real and sensitive experience. As he himself has said, ‘These Sonnets were originally composed in my solitary hours ; when, in youth a wanderer among distant scenes, I sought forgetfulness of the first disappointment in early affections. This is nothing to the public ; but it may serve in some measure to obviate the common remark on melancholy poetry, that it has been very often gravely composed, when possibly the heart of the writer had very little share in the distress he chose to describe. But there is a great difference between natural and fabricated feelings, even in poetry.’ Bowles had, therefore, in the immediate inspiration of his work, that primary quality of Romantic poetry—the actual emotions of the heart. And it was this which caught the attention, and won the loyalty, of Coleridge. ‘Bowles and Cowper of the then living poets’, says the *Biographia Literaria*, ‘were, to the best of my knowledge, the first who combined natural thoughts with natural diction.’ And in a letter to Thelwall, he writes, ‘Bowles, the most tender, and with the exception of Burns, the only always *natural* poet in our language.’ Such a reintroduction to Nature, the province of the Romantic poet, was peculiarly valuable to Coleridge at that time ; in fact, as he himself says, it was of ‘radical good.’ His mind, bewildered in metaphysics and theological controversy, had lost all interest in particular facts ; poetry itself had become insipid. From his ‘preposterous pursuit’, however, he was now ‘auspiciously withdrawn chiefly by the genial influence of a style of poetry, so tender and yet so manly, so natural and real, and yet so dignified and harmonious, as the sonnets and other early poems of Mr. Bowles.’

How immediate and decisive the new impression was upon Coleridge, may be gathered from his own familiar words :—

I had just entered on my seventeenth year [he says], when the sonnets of Mr. Bowles, twenty in number, and just then published in a quarto pamphlet, were first made known and presented to me by a schoolfellow. . My earliest acquaintances will not have forgotten the undisciplined eagerness and impetuous zeal with which I laboured to make proselytes, not only of my companions, but of all with whom I conversed, of whatever rank, and in whatever place. As my school finances did not permit me to purchase copies, I made, within less than a year and a half, more than forty transcriptions, as the best presents I could offer to those who had in any way won my regard. And with almost equal delight did I receive the three or four following publications of the same author.

Nor did this fiery enthusiasm readily burn itself out. At Bristol in 1795, we are told, ‘his stock subjects of conversation were Bishop Berkeley, David Hartley, and Mr. Bowles, whose sonnets he delighted in reciting.’ In 1796—seven years after the publication of the sonnets—Coleridge, writing to Thelwall, speaks of Bowles as ‘the god of his idolatry’, and presents Mrs. Thelwall with a copy of the poems, inscribed, ‘I entreat your acceptance of this volume, which has given me more pleasure, and done my heart more good than all the books I ever read, excepting my Bible.’ In the next year, having all but finished his tragedy, *Osorio*, Coleridge took it over from Bristol to Shaftesbury to submit it to the criticism of his ‘god’. This was their first meeting; and it is now that Cottle places the beginning of some disillusionment in their relations—at any rate, on Coleridge’s part. Possibly Coleridge found that his ‘most high god’

Scourged him, not as one
That smites a son,

for in subsequent years we find him wondering what Bowles thought of the first chapter of his *Biographia*—‘if, indeed, he collated the passages concerning himself, with his own speeches, &c., concerning me.’

Still as late as 1814–8, during his residence at Calne, Coleridge was frequently with Bowles, Bremhill being near. But now the last and fatal coolness arose between them. Positions being for the moment reversed, the idol condescended to the acolyte ; or, in plain English, Bowles offered his poems to Coleridge for correction. ‘Alas !’ says Coleridge, ‘I injured myself irreparably with him by devoting a fortnight to the work.’ That was indeed, we may cry out, to take the matter more seriously than friendship permits. And the result may be predicted. ‘He took the corrections,’ adds Coleridge, ‘but never forgave the corrector.’ ‘He took the corrections’—almost we might believe him to have been assuredly ‘god-like.’

One other instance of relationship between the poets may be recorded. It was Bowles who started what Cottle protests to have been a myth in regard to the composition of the *Religious Musings*. This poem, says Bowles, ‘was written, “non inter sylvas academi,” but in the tap-room at Reading.’ But as Bowles had no personal acquaintance with Cottle at the time, we must accept the word of Cottle, who states, ‘It was written partly at Stowey, partly on Redcliff Hill; and partly in my parlour.’

With another of the Lake poets, Bowles was brought into personal relation. ‘Soon after this third edition [of the sonnets] came out,’ he states, ‘my friend, Mr. Cruttwell, the printer, wrote a letter saying that two young gentlemen, strangers, one a particularly handsome and pleasing youth, lately from Westminster School, and both literary and

intelligent, spoke in high commendation of my volume. . . . From one of them, after he himself had achieved the fame of one of the most virtuous and eloquent of the writers of his generation, I received a first visit at my parsonage in Wiltshire upwards of forty years afterwards! It was Robert Southey.' And Bowles goes on to pay a compliment to personal appearance with a niceness and limitation that is now little practised. 'We parted in my garden last year,' he writes, 'when stealing time and sorrow had marked his still manly and most interesting countenance.' But while we are upon the subject of Southey, it is worth remarking that Southey's wife, Caroline Bowles, was not of the same family as our poet. Bowles himself somewhat stiltedly alludes to her thus: 'my namesake—no otherwise related than by love of kindred music.'

Of contact with Wordsworth, Bowles has left no similar narration. But there is testimony to the outward effect of the sonnets upon the northern poet. Four years after their publication, in 1793, Wordsworth 'first met with them', says the late Mr. Dykes Campbell, 'as he was starting on a walk, and kept his brother waiting on Westminster Bridge until, seated in one of its recesses, he had read through the little quarto.' We have evidence, also, of the meeting of the two poets.

But, in reality, the influence of Bowles upon the more famous of the Romantic School is not to be traced to any accidents of circumstance. Far away from the West Country, Charles Lamb reminds Coleridge of 'the little smoky room at the *Salutation and Cat*' where they had 'sat together through the winter nights beguiling the cares of life with Poesy'; and where much of their conversation had centred on Bowles. In the same letter he speaks of one among Coleridge's poems as 'the most exquisite and

Bowles-like of all.' And elsewhere, like Coleridge, he couples together Bowles and the New Testament.

This influence of the paler light upon his brilliant contemporary has excited astonishment in the camps of the critics. 'The poems produced before the author's twenty-fourth year,' said Sara Coleridge in the edition of 1852, 'devoted as he was to the "soft strains" of Bowles, have more in common with the passionate lyrics of Collins and the picturesque wildness of the pretended Ossian, than with the well-tuned sentimentality of that Muse which the overgrateful poet has represented as his earliest inspirer.' And Traill follows in the same vein. One explanation of Coleridge's susceptibility Canon Ainger finds in the moral quality of Bowles's melodious verse. At a critical point in Coleridge's life, he suggests, his moral nature was touched. And this theory is borne out by Coleridge's own introduction of 1796. Speaking of sonnets generally, he says: 'Easily remembered from their briefness, and interesting alike to the eye and the affections, these are poems which we can "lay up in our heart and our soul," and repeat them "when we walk by the way, and when we lie down, and when we rise up". Hence the Sonnets of Bowles derive their marked superiority over all other Sonnets; hence they domesticate with the heart, and become, as it were, a part of our identity.' And a letter from Lamb in 1796 further confirms the suggestion: 'Coleridge, I love you for dedicating your poetry to Bowles. Genius of the sacred fountain of tears, it was he who led you gently by the hand through all this valley of weeping; shewed you the dark-green yew trees, and the willow shades.'

Coleridge, in speaking of the sonnets, has said, 'Surely never was a writer so equal in excellence!' Accepting, therefore, this criticism, it is of the less moment which of

the series we select for consideration. But, perhaps, that termed ‘Influence of Time on Grief’ may not least admirably illustrate that ‘exquisite delicacy of painting’ and the ‘tender simplicity’ which Coleridge has noted :—

O Time ! who know’st a lenient hand to lay
 Softest on Sorrow’s wound, and slowly thence
 (Lulling to sad repose the weary sense)
 The faint pang steals unperceived away ;
 On thee I rest my only hope at last,
 And think, when thou hast dried the bitter tear
 That flows in vain o’er all my soul held dear,
 I may look back on every sorrow past,
 And meet life’s peaceful evening with a smile :—
 As some lone bird, at day’s departing hour,
 Sings in the sunbeam, of the transient shower
 Forgetful, though its wings are wet the while :—
 Yet ah ! how much must that poor heart endure,
 Which hopes from thee, and thee alone, a cure !

The image of the bird is worthy of all Coleridge could say of it for tenderness and delicacy. Nor is this, from the description of the ‘matin bird’ in another sonnet, inferior in its own quality :—

Or marks the clouds, that o’er the mountain’s head
 In varying forms fantastic wander white.

Such a modulation of the metre, and placing of the word ‘white’, come only from clear senses and an intimate vision. It is possible to see the uncertain visitations of the clouds in the fall and liftings of the rhythm. Nor less excellent, in the earlier picturesque manner, and with something of the light of Turner, is this :—

Of rivers winding wild, and mountains hoar,
 Or castle gleaming on the distant steep !

The sonnet quoted above in its entirety, is characteristic, too of Bowles on the technical side. ‘Charlotte Smith

and Bowles', said Coleridge, 'are they who first made the sonnet popular among the present English: I am justified therefore by analogy in deducing its laws from *their* compositions.' But legislation by such deductions would not satisfy the rigid historical critic. For Bowles himself says of his art: 'I confined myself to fourteen lines, because fourteen lines seemed best adapted to unity of sentiment. I thought nothing about the strict Italian model.' And it will be observed that there is no rigid demarcation of octave and sestet. Indeed, here, as in most of Bowles's work, there is, strictly speaking, nothing of sestet and octave at all. The emotion flows on; and the melancholy sententiousness of the poet is reflected in the use of the closing couplet. Yet neither is it, of course, of the Shakespearian form. Though there comes no turn of sentiment between octave and sestet, the division is marked in the rhyme arrangements. And Bowles occasionally has his sestet correct according to the less strict Italian model, and once even with the rigorous law of the two rhymes. Yet as a rule he deviates from the Italian sestet by introducing the couplet. Moreover, even in the octave he is not Shakespearian, observing a different rhyme arrangement.

But to say this is not to differentiate Bowles from the later romantic poets. Wordsworth very frequently departs from the Italian scheme. In his sonnet, for example,

The world is too much with us,
although he preserves the turn in the sentiment, he yet begins his sestet in the middle of the line,

Great God! I'd rather be
A pagan suckled in a creed outworn.

And the form that Bowles uses, like all poetry worthy the name, has an integral relation to the subject. He has

a thought that is really twofold ; but the proportions are not equal. It has not turned when the sestet is reached ; but the turning is anticipated in the rhyme-arrangement, and is finally made in the couplet.

A second sonnet may be quoted, from its interest to lovers of more recent poetry. It is termed *The Approach of Summer* :—

How shall I meet thee, Summer, wont to fill
My heart with gladness, when thy pleasant tide
First came, and on the Coomb's romantic side
Was heard the distant cuckoo's hollow bill !
Fresh flowers shall fringe the margin of the stream,
As with the songs of joyance and of hope
The hedgerows shall ring loud, and on the slope
The poplars sparkle in the passing beam ;
The shrubs and laurels that I loved to tend,
Thinking their May-tide fragrance would delight,
With many a peaceful charm, thee, my poor friend,
Shall put forth their green shoots, and cheer the sight !
But I shall mark their hues with sadder eyes,
And weep the more for one who in the cold earth lies !

The octave—if it be not fancy—seems to speak not only the sentiments, but with something of the actual voice, of the author of *Thyrsis*. Both, of course, rest on a common model ; but it is more than this to use the same vocal tones. Nor is that a small thing when the other poem is one which Swinburne has set beside the *Lycidas* and the *Adonais*. This sonnet has the additional interest of closing upon an alexandrine—a feature unusual in this form of composition, but found also in Coleridge.

Professor Vaughan has remarked of Coleridge's characterization of Bowles's poetry—'mild and manliest melancholy'—that it is not very aptly said. Of the mildness, the suffusion as over an autumnal landscape,

Some softened notes, to Nature not untrue,

as Bowles himself describes it, and of the melancholy, there can be no doubt: the manliness alone, it may be presumed, is in question. And if we look to the *Sonnets* only, this doubt may, perhaps, be justified. But from the other poems which Coleridge mentions, passages confirmatory of his epithet may be quoted, as this from the *Monody at Matlock* :—

Yet the bleak cliffs so high
(Around whose beetling crags, with ceaseless coil,
And still-returning flight, the ravens toil)
Heed not the changeful seasons as they fly,
Nor spring, nor autumn: they their hoary brow
Uplift, and ages past, as in this now,
The same deep trenches unsubdued have worn,
The same majestic frown, and looks of lofty scorn.

So Fortitude, a mailèd warrior old,
Appears: he lifts his scar-intrenched crest:
The tempest gathers round his dauntless breast:
He hears far-off the storm of havoc roll'd:
The feeble fall around: their sound is past:
Their sun is set: their place no more is known:
Like the wan leaves before the winter's blast
They perish:—He unshaken and alone
Remains—his brow a sterner shade assumes,
By age ennobled, whilst the hurricane,
That raves resistless o'er the ravaged plain,
But shakes unfelt his helmet's quiv'ring plumes.

That passage, by any standard, is, I venture to affirm, almost magnificent, though its originality may be impaired by obligations to Milton. Certainly it does not require the admonitory words addressed to the prospective disciple in the *Biographia*: ‘The reader must make himself acquainted with the general style of composition that was at that time deemed poetry, in order to understand and account for the effect produced on me by the Sonnets, the

Monody at Matlock, and the *Hope*, of Mr. Bowles; for it is peculiar to original genius to become less and less striking, in proportion to its success in improving the taste and judgement of its contemporaries.' And though there is a diffuseness and weakness about much of Bowles, in places there is a concentration and energy not unworthy of the masters—as here, to an old man :—

But standing thus, time-palsied, and forlorn,
Like a scathed oak, of all its boughs bereft,
God and the grave are thy best refuge left.

The last line has the Shakespearian ring.

If, then, we ask of Bowles's influence on Coleridge, what it really was, and how it came to be, we may find it in his loyalty to truth and Nature and in his sense of the worth and dignity of man in his primary relations, which was the leaven of the *Lyrical Ballads* and the watchword of the Wordsworthian prefaces. Bowles has himself stated his own standard of poetry, and his conception of his achievement. 'It is a consolation', he writes at the end of his life, 'that, from youth to age, I have found no line I wished to blot, or departed a moment from the severer taste which I imbibed from the simplest and purest models of classical composition.' And if Bowles could point Coleridge to the study of the older models, and summon him also to the contemplation of natural emotions and the use of natural words; if he could call him up, as Coleridge says, 'from delving in the unwholesome mines of metaphysic lore', where he was digging out such metal of poetry as this :—

Contemplant Spirits! ye who hover o'er
With untired gaze the immeasurable fount
Ebullient with creative Deity!

and set him in the sweet sylvan paths where he was to hear

The hidden brook
In the leafy month of June,
That to the sleeping woods all night
Singeth a quiet tune,

or lead him to those dread waters whence coming he might say,

O Wedding-Guest ! this soul hath been
Alone on a wide wide sea :
So lonely 'twas, that God himself
Scarce seemèd there to be,—

then Bowles might well take credit for service done to the purest and most exalted conceptions of the Muses, and for a gift to English poetry, as Swinburne would say, ‘beyond praise and beyond thanksgiving.’

But this, perhaps, was not all the gift. Whatever the original stimulus of Bowles upon Coleridge, it seems clear that Bowles had, in reality, as Tennyson said of himself in relation to Shakespeare, no conception of the mind-processes which went to create the most characteristic work of the greater poet. The *Ancient Mariner* bears no tangible traces of the *Sonnets* or the other poems. But with regard to Wordsworth, usually accounted the more self-dependent mind, the case may be different. For in Bowles we have something of the doctrine and the actual manner of Wordsworth’s greatest work.¹ Thus in the *Sonnets* there is an approximation to the idea of Nature as a sympathetic Being :—

¹ Compare Akenside :—

How gladly I recall your well-known seats
Beloved of old, and that delightful time
When all alone, for many a summer’s day,
I wander’d through your calm recesses, led
In silence by some powerful hand unseen.

The waving branches that romantic bend
 O'er thy tall banks, a soothing charm bestow ;
 The murmurs of thy wand'ring wave below
 Seem to his ear the pity of a friend.

And the parallelism is yet clearer in these lines from the *Monody at Matlock* :—

Nor may I, sweet stream !
 From thy wild banks and still retreats depart
 (Where now I meditate my casual theme)
 Without some mild improvement on my heart
 Pour'd sad, yet pleasing ! so may I forget
 The crosses and the cares that sometimes fret
 Life's smoothest channel.

That is the very sentiment of the *Lines at Tintern Abbey* ; and the movement of the metre is strangely similar—a fact the more remarkable because the *Monody* is in rhyme, though it reads like blank verse. Now the *Monody* was written in 1791, the *Lines at Tintern* not till 1798. Or, again, take from the same *Monody* this passage, of Matlock High Tor :—

He the winter dark
 Regardless, and the wasteful time that flies,
 Rejoicing in his lonely might, defies.

'Rejoicing in his lonely might' is of the essence of Wordsworth's most imaginative utterance. Or take this, from *St. Michael's Mount* :—

The tall ship moves not on the tranquil brine ;
 Around, the solemn promontories shine ;
 No sounds approach us, save, at times, the cry
 Of the grey gull, that scarce is heard so high !
 The billows make no noise, and on the breast
 Of charmed Ocean, Silence sinks to rest !

Those verses, and especially

Around, the solemn promontories shine,

produce the effect of the unearthliness of the silence of sea and land, bright, and flashing like a shield, that vertigo of stillness, if we may profanely term it, which is the peculiar property of the *Elegiac Stanzas on Peele Castle*. Yet Wordsworth's poem was written in 1805, but that of Bowles as early as 1798. Finally we quote this passage from *Coombe Ellen* :—

Stranger! if Nature charm thee—if thou lovest
 To trace her awful steps, in glade or glen,
 Or under covert of the rocking wood,
 That sways its murmuring and mossy boughs
 Above thy head; now, when the wind at times
 Stirs its deep silence round thee, and the shower
 Falls on the sighing foliage—hail her here
 In these her haunts; and wrapt in musings high,
 Think that thou holdest converse with some Power
 Invisible and strange.'

That is dated September, 1798—the month in which the *Lyrical Ballads* appeared. It may, therefore, owe something to their authors: on the other hand, it may be due to the stirrings of the spirit of the same period.

These coincidences of doctrine and manner in the case of Bowles and Wordsworth claim attention. It is not, of course, that Wordsworth could owe the bulk of his work, or the supreme excellence of his highest things, to Bowles. The haunting harmony of this,

The sound
 Of far-off torrents charming the still night,
 and the mystery of that unapproachable line,

Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone—
 these things are beyond the reach of Bowles. Nor is it suggested that Wordsworth's originality is impaired, in any appreciable degree, by these coincidences. From the time

when he saw the darkening of the boughs and leaves of the oak against the sky in his evening walk between Hawkshead and Ambleside, his own debt was to the direct observation of Nature. But it is, at least, worthy of remark that these poems of Bowles were antecedent to those of Wordsworth ; and that both Bowles and his works were known to him. It may, therefore, be reasonably contended that Bowles was a definitely formative influence upon Wordsworth, just as (to bring together the smaller and the greater) Southey confessed that for almost forty years he endeavoured to form himself on the ‘sweet and unsophisticated style of Bowles.’

If we come now to sum up the position of Bowles in English poetry, we shall mark it best by regarding him first as the successor in the work of his masters, the Wartons. Thus, speaking of Joseph Warton, he says, ‘ No one excelled him in pure critical taste, and an accurate appreciation of whatever was truly poetical. To his criticisms, and to those of his brother Thomas Warton, we are indebted, in some respects, I sincerely believe, for a juster idea of genuine poetic excellence.’ And again :—

Thy cheering voice,
O Warton ! bade my silent heart rejoice,
And waked to love of Nature: every breeze,
On Itchin’s bank, was melody : the trees
Waved in fresh beauty.

But if we would seek the genesis of Bowles’s manner as seen in the *Sonnets*, we must go to Thomas Warton. It is found in the Sonnet to the river Lodon :—

Ah ! what a weary race my feet have run,
Since first I trod thy banks with alders crown’d,
And thought my way was all thro’ fairy ground,
Beneath thy azure sky, and golden sun :

Where first my Muse to lisp her notes begun !
 While pensive Memory traces back the round,
 Which fills the varied interval between ;
 Much pleasure, more of sorrow, marks the scene.
 Sweet native stream ! those skies and suns so pure
 No more return, to cheer my evening road !
 Yet still one joy remains, that not obscure,
 Nor useless, all my vacant days have flow'd,
 From youth's gay dawn to manhood's prime mature ;
 Nor with the Muse's laurel unbestow'd.

That might be Bowles himself, save that it is less musical. And to the Wartons, no doubt, Bowles owed that interest in the picturesque which inspired his *Grave of the Last Saxon*, his ballad of *The Cid*, and his prose *Annals of Lacock Abbey*.

From the Wartons, again, the inheritance of romantic poetry may be traced primarily to Milton. This Bowles points out in a prose passage ; and the influence on his verse is only too apparent :—

Yet once more
 I call her, and once more her converse sweet,
 'Mid the still limits of this wild retreat,
 I woo.

Indeed, Bowles throughout his poetry is much too directly reminiscent, and incorporates too much from others. But the influences on his work are not confined to Milton. We have Shakespearian echoes ; and, more interesting, this exquisite song, adapted in rhythm from *The Maid's Tragedy* :—

Lay me where the willows wave,
 In the cold moon-light ;
 Shine upon my lowly grave,
 Sadly, stars of night !

And the imitations of Spenser are apparent,
 An ancient man appeared in amice gray.

So, too, before Keats, he has ‘paly’, ‘gleamy’, and ‘beamly’; and he makes reference to Browne’s *Britannia’s Pastorals*. And there are in his verses strange words—‘blood-boltered’ from Shakespeare, ‘pinnets’, and ‘rivel’d’. He seems, too, to have handed on the word ‘succinet’ from Pope to its beautiful use by Landor. And he makes mention of the kraken.

Bowles, therefore, has in his poetry virtually all the elements of the Romantic school. As time went on, he in his turn became indebted to others of that group. There are, in the *Banwell Hill*, the mannerisms of *The Excursion*. And this owes its debt to *Endymion* :—

In the great world there was not one beside
For whom he cared, since his own mother died.

But that is only to say that he took, as well as gave, in the great interchange of ideas of his time. His own attitude towards his contemporaries, and the vicissitudes he witnessed, may be read in the Advertisement to his *Saint John in Patmos* :—

Since these were written, I have lived to hear the sounds of other harps, whose masters have struck far more sublime chords, and died. I have lived to see among them females of the highest poetical rank, and many illustrious masters of the lyre, whose names I need not specify, crowned with younger and more verdant laurels, which they yet gracefully wear. Some who now rank high in the poet’s art have acknowledged that their feelings were first excited by these youthful strains, which I have now with melancholy feelings, revised for the last time.

So much, then, for the practice of poetry. We turn now to Bowles’s statement of its principles. The prolonged and bitter controversy in which Bowles engaged on this subject arose, of course, from his edition of Pope, published in 1806, in ten volumes. For this he received £300 ; and thus

experienced, Byron declared, ‘how much easier it was to profit by the reputation of another, than to elevate his own.’

Of the duties of an editor, Bowles took a moral view. ‘I suppressed with indignation’, he says, ‘the *Imitation of Horace*, which I believe he wrote—the most obscene and daring piece of profligacy that ever issued from the press, since the days of Charles the Second.’ Bowles seems to have had two reasons for the method he chose; for he speaks somewhere of his duty to society, and again he regards it as important to protect the good name of Pope.

‘Some original papers’, he says, ‘have been, for obvious reasons, omitted. Those which have been published I do not think can detract from the moral character of the writer. What man, indeed, if all the errors of his youth were severely scanned, could escape censure? In other respects the letters are natural, interesting, and creditable to his feelings.’ This method of editing is contrary, of course, to that adopted by Scott; and, from the scientific standpoint, is deplorable. Morally, however, it is intelligible, and not least in a man of Bowles’s cloth. And, after all, it is only a question of degree. There are some letters of great men which all scholars prefer to study in manuscript. Nor was Bowles merely prudish. ‘If the chapter of *The Double Mistress*, after some hesitation, has found a place,’ the Preface says, ‘it has been on account of its exquisite humour, and because, though offensive to delicacy, it is not seductive or dangerous to principles.’

Nor, again, is it just to speak of Bowles’s edition as though it were an elaborate monument erected for the set purpose of casting a shadow on Pope’s memory. Thus De Quincey speaks of the malice of Bowles, adding that he

had himself refrained from a like work of editing Pope through an adverse estimate of his character. And Swinburne stigmatizes ‘the successive severity of the three Anglican clergymen who have edited and defamed him as poet or as man.’ And he adds: ‘After the Reverend Mr. Warton came the Reverend Mr. Bowles, and after the Reverend Mr. Bowles comes the Reverend Mr. Elwin. “Hear them ! All these against one foreigner !” cries Mr. Browning’s Luria ; and “See them ! All these against one Liberal Catholic !” a lay student may be tempted and permitted to exclaim at sight of so many cassocked commentators opening in full cry upon the trail of this poet.’ Of the abstract question whether a man should edit who is without admiration for his subject, it is unnecessary to speak, though it may be remarked in passing that even Pope cannot always demand or obtain a Warburton to give philosophic life to his abortive speculations and spiritual rectitude to his unconscious heresies. Abstract treatment of the question is unnecessary ; for Bowles had an entirely adequate appreciation of much of Pope’s character and performance. Hear him. ‘With regard to powers of poetical execution, none was ever Pope’s superior.’ And so of the *Epistle of Eloisa*, ‘I shall not be deemed as giving reluctant praise, when I declare my conviction of its being infinitely superior to everything of the kind, ancient or modern. . . . It is sufficient, that nothing of the kind has ever been produced equal to it for pathos, painting, and melody.’ And yet again of *The Rape of the Lock*: ‘He stands alone, unrivalled, and possibly never to be rivalled. All Pope’s successful labour of correct and musical versification, all his talents of accurate description, though in an inferior province of Poetry, are here consummately displayed. . . . The Muse has, indeed, no longer her great characteristic

attributes, pathos and sublimity; but she appears so interesting, that we almost doubt whether the garb of elegant refinement is not as captivating as the most beautiful appearances of Nature.' It would be absurd, in the face of remarks like that, to maintain that Bowles had not a high admiration of certain sides of Pope's genius.

And the same holds true, though to a less extent, of his examination of Pope's moral character. Thus he can say, 'That he was a most dutiful and affectionate son, a kind master, a sincere friend, and, generally speaking, a benevolent man, is undoubted.' And it must be pointed out that Bowles assumes Johnson's *Life* to be in the reader's hands. This disposes of Roscoe's hypothesis—'if we were implicitly to receive our impressions of the character of Pope from the representations of Mr. Bowles.' For Bowles makes no pretension to have produced a definitive edition *in saecula saeculorum*, or to have sealed up the mortal remains of Truth. Anything he may add is to be taken as supplementary to the *Lives of the Poets*. And in these additional remarks, Bowles notes only one characteristic that has been untouched by Johnson—Pope's licentiousness. But for the other features, his vanity, jealousy, animosity and love of stratagem, they have been commented on, and in much stronger terms, by Johnson. In one place, the representative and dictator of eighteenth-century opinion says that 'Pope had been flattered till he thought himself one of the moving powers in the system of life.' Elsewhere he remarks, 'Pope was reduced to sneak and shuffle, sometimes to deny, and sometimes to apologize; he first endeavours to wound, and is then afraid to own that he meant a blow.' Nor, apart from Johnson, is Bowles unique, either among friends or enemies, in his

estimate of Pope's character. De Quincey says, 'Simply and constitutionally, he was incapable of a sincere thought or a sincere emotion.' And that eminent eighteenth-century scholar, the late Sir Leslie Stephen, calls Pope a 'liar and a hypocrite'. But charges such as these will, in many eyes, outweigh the one of 'indecent, and sometimes *profane*, levity', which Bowles advances. Why Byron was to turn so hotly on Bowles for his accusation of licentiousness, it is easy to see, and may be premised now. It was the same reason which stirred Byron's indignation at Bowles's pity for Pope on the ground that he could attract no affection because of his deformity. And the latter charge was to Byron the more hateful, because it stung him more closely. The secret sympathy of Byron with Pope, it is impossible not to suspect, lay not least in the fact that Byron also was deformed, and, being inordinately proud, was proportionately sensitive. That phenomenon of psychology was one of the chief motive powers in the Byron and Bowles controversy, as it may have produced the original warp in all Byron's character and performance. But that Bowles was without charity, cannot be pretended. Otherwise he could not have written :—

If these and other parts of his character appear less amiable, let the reader constantly keep in mind the physical and moral causes which operated on a mind like his: let him remember his life, 'one long disease'; the natural passions, which he must have felt in common with all the world, disappointed; his tenderness thrown back on his heart, only to gather there with more force, and more ineffectual wishes; his confined education, intrusted chiefly to those who were themselves narrow-minded; his being used from the cradle to listen only to the voice of partial indulgence; of tenderness, almost maternal, in all who contemplated his weakness and his incipient talents.

When he has duly weighed these things, and attended to every alleviating circumstance that his knowledge of the world, or his charity, may suggest, then let him not hastily condemn what truth compels me to state; but let him rather, without presuming on his own virtues, lament the imperfection of our common nature, and leave the judgement to Him, ‘who knoweth whereof we are made, who remembereh we are but dust.’

Parts of that summary may, to some ears, bear the sound of unctuousness. But it was an ethical language that would not have been alien to Fielding himself; and, at least, it is idle to pretend that it is the utterance of mere bile and animus.

But more, perhaps, than the formal Life and Character of Pope, the running commentary which Bowles suffixed to the text may have exasperated the headier among the disciples of Pope. Thus we find such bitter-sweet appendices as these: ‘I shall say nothing of this precious complimentary epistle, which appears as laboured as it is contemptible’; ‘this is all very well said; but is it the exact truth?’ ‘this is very much in the strain of Sir Fretful Plagiary’ But, on the other hand, we have footnotes of this character: ‘The modulation and change here are very beautiful’; and in the *Eloisa*, ‘This is the most exquisite description of the first commencement of passion, that our language, or perhaps any other, affords.’ In fact, editing is a manner of criticism that is the fairest and most illuminating of any, but from which many are deterred by its extreme laboriousness. And the question of Bowles’s motives may be said to be disposed of by his postscript to the Life: ‘If it should be thought I have in some places spoken too harshly of Pope’s conduct, I can only say, I should not have considered myself an *honest man* if I had spoken otherwise.’

It was, however, round the principles of poetic criticism laid down by Bowles that the later conflict was to be longest sustained. Bowles's main argument asserted that a Poetry which draws its images from Nature is, as such, more poetical than a Poetry deriving its images from Art ; and that a Poetry treating of the passions is, as such, more poetical than a Poetry of artificial manners. But he made a reservation that the execution must be equal ; a reader, he thought, might nod over the *Creation* of Blackmore who could remain vivaciously awake with *The Rape of the Lock*. Such argumentation in the abstract is perilous, and not very illuminating. As Coleridge said, of another occasion, 'We would not have an Act of Uniformity against poets.' Nevertheless, Bowles's main contention embodies the highest truth.

Not so, however, did all these things appear to many of the literary at that time ; and out of the edition came the controversy—a conflict which extended from start to finish over nineteen years, which involved, besides Bowles, Campbell, Byron, Isaac Disraeli, Gilchrist, Roscoe, M^cDermot, Hazlitt and the Blackwood reviewers, and had scarcely died out in De Quincey's papers of 1848 and 1851.

In January, 1808, Bowles's edition was reviewed in the *Edinburgh*. The Review found that Bowles, 'though untainted by the grosser heresies of the day,' was influenced by 'an inordinate preference of descriptive poetry', 'a deluge which, since the days of Thomson, had swept over the lower regions of Parnassus.' It refused to 'permit the bards of former days to be thus arraigned before a jury of tourists and draughtsmen, for the want of excellences of which their own contemporaries had never dreamed'. Finally, it said that the edition 'exhibited neither the

industry of a commentator,¹ nor the elegance of a poetical critic.' 'There may be', it affirmed, 'a few good remarks, but we sincerely think they are very few. Upon the whole we recommend to this gentleman to abstain from prose, and to think rhyme as indispensable to his appearance in public, as a bag and sword are at court.'

In 1809 came out *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. Bowles was pilloried along with Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Walter Scott.

Hail, Sympathy ! thy soft idea brings
 A thousand visions of a thousand things,
 And shows, still whimpering through threescore of years,
 The maudlin prince of mournful sonneteers.
 And art thou not their prince, harmonious Bowles !
 Thou first, great oracle of tender souls ?

In later years, Byron was to seek an excuse for entry into the prose controversy ; yet the poet had no call to consider himself 'dragged' into the controversy, who could make spontaneously this censure :—

Bowles ! in thy memory let this precept dwell,
 Stick to thy Sonnets, Man !—at least they sell.
 But if some new-born whim, or larger bribe,
 Prompt thy crude brain, and claim thee for a scribe; . . .
 If Pope, whose fame and genius, from the first,
 Have failed the best of critics, needs the worst,
 Do thou essay: each fault, each failing scan ;
 The first of poets was, alas ! but man.
 Rake from the ancient dunghill ev'ry pearl,
 Consult Lord Fanny, and confide in Curril ;
 Let all the scandals of a former age
 Perch on thy pen, and flutter o'er thy page ;

¹ In support of the *Edinburgh*, one curious inaccuracy on the part of Bowles may, indeed, be noted. Cf. his *Pope*, vol. ix, p. 391 (London, 1806) :—'Pope, when Swift was alive, professed he had a heart and a fortune for both, but mentions him, after his death, with no other words than "Dr. Swift." Swift, of course, survived Pope some eighteen months.

Affect a candour which thou canst not feel,
 Clothe envy in a garb of honest zeal . . .
 Oh ! hadst thou lived in that congenial time,
 To rave with Dennis, and with Ralph to rhyme ;
 Thronged with the rest around *his* living head,
 Not raised thy hoof against the lion dead,
 A meet reward had crowned thy glorious gains,
 And linked thee to the Dunciad for thy pains.

The war was resumed in 1819, when Campbell prefixed to his *Specimens of the British Poets* his *Essay on English Poetry*. In this, in reply to Bowles's elevation of images drawn from nature over those drawn from art, he states that 'artificial objects and manners are of so much importance in fiction, as to make the exquisite description of them no less characteristic of genius than the description of simple physical appearances. . . . Nature is the poet's goddess ; but by nature, no one rightly understands her mere inanimate face—however charming it may be—or the simple landscape painting of trees, clouds, precipices and flowers. Why then try Pope, or any other poet, exclusively by his powers of describing inanimate phenomena ?' And he adds his famous illustration from the launching of a ship of the line, as an 'example of the sublime objects of artificial life.' 'All the days of battle and the nights of danger which she had to encounter, all the ends of the earth which she had to visit, and all that she had to do and suffer for her country, rose in awful presentiment before the mind ; and when the heart gave her a benediction, it was like one pronounced on a living being.'

To this Bowles replied in his *Invariable Principles of Poetry*. He complained that Campbell had not read the contentions he attacked ; for it had never been asserted that nature 'was not moral as well as external.' And he

sums up the heads of the argument in a comprehensive passage :—

The plain course of my argument was simply this :—1st. *Works of nature*, speaking of those more beautiful and sublime, are more sublime and beautiful than works of art ; therefore more poetical.—2nd. The passions of the human heart, which are the same in all ages, and which are the causes of the sublime and pathetic in sentiment, are more poetical than *artificial manners*.—3rd. The great poet of human passions is the most consummate master of his art ; and the heroic, the lofty, and the pathetic, as belonging to this class, are distinguished.—4th. If these premises be true, the descriptive poet, who paints from an intimate knowledge of external nature, is more poetical, supposing the fidelity and execution equal, *not* than the painter of human passions, but the painter of external circumstances in *artificial life* ; as Cowper paints a morning walk, and Pope a game of cards !

This is the ground of my argument ; and your representation, leaving out the most essential part, is this : ‘ He alone is a poet, who paints from works of external nature ; and this knowledge of external nature must be as minute as that of a botanist and Dutch painter ! ’ . . . You have totally left out the middle of my argument, and ridiculously joined the head and the legs, like the picture of Nobody in the London shops.

The *Invariable Principles* let loose the floodgates of the pamphleteers ; and there streamed from the press Disraeli’s ‘ Review of Spence’s *Anecdotes and Men* ’ in the *Quarterly* for July, 1820, being an attack on the *Invariable Principles* ; Bowles’s *Reply to the Charges in the Quarterly* (Oct. 1820), attacking Gilchrist as the supposed author ; Gilchrist’s *Letter* in reply to this Pamphlet (Dec. 1820) ; Bowles’s *Observations*, with a *Sequel* addressed to Octavius Gilchrist, Esq. F.A.S. (Feb. 1821).

In March, 1821, appeared Byron's *Letter on Bowles's Strictures*—Byron, magnificent in his onset, his swagger, and his irrelevance. He deals first with the charge of licentiousness, and hints that he might bring a retaliatory attack from his knowledge of the youthful Bowles; and proceeds: 'The truth is, that in these days the grand *primum mobile* of England is *cant*; cant political, cant poetical, cant religious, cant moral; but always *cant*, multiplied through all the varieties of life.'

The mention of Art affords Byron an opportunity of narrating his journeys in the Aegean, with the statement that the works of art there are more poetical than the works of nature—and for this purpose he brings us by Hymettus, Pentelicus, the wilder parts of Greece, Asia Minor, Switzerland, many scenes of Italy, Cintra in Portugal, and the Sierras of Spain. The ship of the line happily enables him to speak of swimming: 'I look upon myself as entitled to talk of naval matters, at least to poets: with the exception of Walter Scott, Moore, and Southey, perhaps, who have been voyagers, I have *swum* more miles than all the rest of them together now living ever *sailed*.' Finally, he enters, with a fine gust, upon a description of the great battle between Gully and Gregson, and of Cribb and Horton, 'a fresh-coloured man'.—But the poets have ever immortal youth!

Two serious arguments Byron advances. The one is that sculpture surpasses life, and is therefore more poetical than nature. This is indeed the Aristotelian conception, though it is strange to find Byron on the side of the author of the

Vade mecum of the true sublime,
Which makes so many poets and some fools.

But poetry and sculpture, it may be remarked, are really

sister-arts, working on the raw material of life in different spheres ; and it does not follow that because sculpture is more sublime than life in its own province, its creations are therefore fitted to form the subject of the further sublimating processes of poetry.

His second serious argument is this, that ‘the highest of all poetry is ethical poetry, as the highest of all earthly objects must be moral truth.’ Pope, he says, is ‘the most perfect of our poets, and the purest of our moralists.’ . . . If any great national or natural convulsion could or should overwhelm your country in such sort as to sweep Great Britain from the kingdoms of the earth, and leave only that, after all, the most living of human things, a dead language—an Englishman, anxious that the posterity of strangers should know that there had been such a thing as a British Epic and Tragedy, might wish for the preservation of Shakespeare and Milton ; but the surviving World would snatch Pope from the wreck, and let the rest sink with the people. He is the moral poet of all civilization ; and as such, let us hope that he will one day be the national poet of mankind. He is the only poet that never shocks ; the only poet whose *faultlessness* has been made his reproach. Cast your eye over his productions ; consider their extent, and contemplate their variety—pastoral, passion, mock heroic, translation, satire, ethics—all excellent, and often perfect.

Now, we may exclaim with Stevenson, the buttons are off the foils !

For—to use another figure—we have here the very apotheosis of Pope. The *Edinburgh*, in its review of Bowles’s edition, had said : ‘That Pope is not of the class of Milton and Shakespeare is indisputable ; and, notwithstanding the two volumes, in which Dr. Warton thought it necessary to prove this truism, we doubt whether any critic, even during the flattery of his own age, ever thought of

placing him so high.' But, apart from Byron, the *Edinburgh* was wrong. Witness Goldsmith: 'It is probable, if our countrymen were called upon to shew a specimen of their genius to foreigners, *The Rape of the Lock* would be the work fixed upon.'

If, then, we seek to form some judgement upon the merits of this controversy, it must be confessed that Bowles was not the man, from the artistic standpoint, to estimate the personal character and poetic value of Pope. For Bowles's deliberate opinion was this: 'Poetry is certainly *secondary* to Truth.' But, in spite of much assertion to the contrary, and of many of his own statements, as here,

Know then this truth (enough for Man to know),
Virtue alone is Happiness below,

this is not the true opinion of Pope. Pope lived for Poetry, and had no concern with Truth, apart from Poetry. 'To follow poetry as one ought,' he writes, 'one must forget father and mother, and cleave to it alone.' And again, 'When people talk of going to church, I think of sacrifices and libations ; when I see the parson, I address him as Chryses priest of Apollo ; and instead of the Lord's Prayer, I begin,

God of the silver bow.'

That was the true temper of Pope, as it has been of all poets who have risen from the literal interpretation of life to the fashioning of its symbols. But to that height Bowles never attained. There is this truth in Byron's charge of 'cant', that Bowles has about him an unpleasant tang of superiority. How otherwise could he have been guilty of this: 'Let me take this opportunity of vindicating a respectable class of men, the English Poets'? The fundamental quality of Pope's mind was missed, therefore, by

Bowles. It was missed by Byron, no less, in his prose criticisms, and realized by him only through intuition, in the whole tone of his *Don Juan*. But it was realized by the *Edinburgh* reviewer: 'It appears to us, we confess, that Pope's, or any other man's character as a poet, must depend upon 'his art and powers' solely, and in no degree upon the subject he has selected.' And it was realized by Roscoe in his edition of 1824, where he maintains in like manner the theory of Art for Art.

Pope, however, freed though he was from the literal interpretation of life and capable of fashioning symbols, fashioned only the symbols of negation.

Behold the child, by nature's kindly law,
Pleased with a rattle, tickled with a straw :
Some livelier play-thing gives his youth delight,
A little louder, but as empty quite :
Scarfs, garters, gold amuse his riper stage,
And beads and pray'r-books are the toys of age :
Pleas'd with this bauble still, as that before,
Till tir'd he sleeps, and Life's poor play is o'er.

That is the philosophy of the vanity of man, and it is the note of Byron's *Childe Harold* and *Manfred*.

Men some to pleasure, some to business take,
But every woman is at heart a Rake.

That is the philosophy of disillusionment; and it is the note of *Don Juan*.

But we have only to set these passages over against the works of the Romantic poets, to see that theirs were positive symbols. The *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality* speaks far otherwise of human destiny than the *Essay on Man*. The *Prometheus Unbound* is a paean, not of human limitation, but of human perfectibility. And the faith of Keats,

Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty : that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know,
is a faith in which poets may call up spirits of radiant life
and splendour, not phantoms of death and night.

It was for this cause, then, that Bowles contended. For it is the virtue of the positive symbol that it is taken by the literal interpreter of life for his Truth. So that Bowles's argument was in reality this, that there is a worth and beauty of the symbol ; that the principles of art are not the fluctuating slaves of fashion, nor, as Byron affirmed, is it now Homer, and now Virgil, once Dryden, and since Walter Scott ; but rather those principles are invariable. Or, if change there be, then is it such as the succession of night given for human weakness to follow day. It was for this truth that Bowles, in his degree, did battle ; and his effort was the gift he has left, and the reason for our gratitude. For Poetry, which Plato and Shelley proclaimed to be a divine madness, he too knew for celestial and unchanged. So that not without offering was he to the Muses in the day when, turning from the imagination of disillusionment and the vanity of human wishes, they unscaled their eyes at the unfailing fountains of Beauty and Love, and renewed their youth of immortal aspiration.

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